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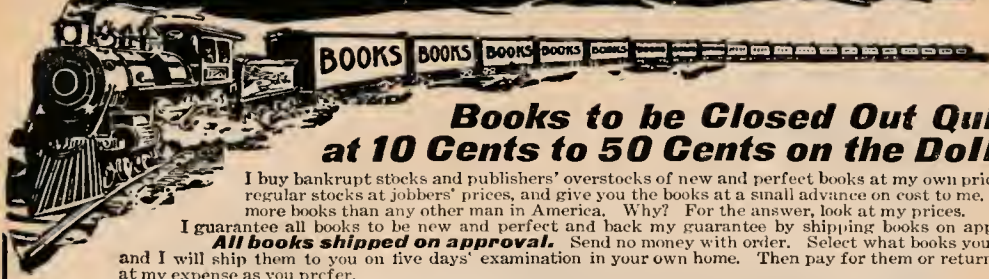
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THE CAVALIER

Vol. IV.

NOVEMBER, 1909.

No. 2.

MORNING STAR.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD,

Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," "Mr. Meeson's Will,"
"Allan Quatermain," "Swallow," Etc., Etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLOT OF ABI.



It was evening in Egypt, thousands of years ago, when the Prince Abi, governor of Memphis and of great territories in the Delta, made fast his ship of state to a quay beneath the outermost walls of the mighty city of Uast or Thebes, which we moderns know as Luxor and Karnac on the Nile.

Abi, a large man, very dark of skin, for his mother was one of the hated Hyksos barbarians who once had usurped the throne of Egypt, sat upon the deck of his ship and stared at the setting sun which for a few moments seemed to rest, a round ball of fire, upon the bare and rugged mountains, that ring round the tombs of the kings.

He was angry, as the slave-women, who stood on either side fanning him, could see well enough by the scowl on his coarse face and the fire in his large black eyes. Presently they felt it also, for one of them, staring at the temples and palaces of the wonderful city made glorious by the light of the setting sun, that city of which she had heard so often, touched his head with the feathers of her fan.

Thereon, as though glad of an excuse

to express his ill-humor, Abi sprang up and boxed her ears so heavily that the poor girl fell to the deck.

"Awkward cat," he cried, "do that again and you shall be flogged until your robe sticks to your back!"

"Pardon, mighty lord," she said, beginning to weep, "it was an accident; the wind caught my fan."

"So the rod shall catch your skin, if you are not more careful, Merytra. Stop that snivelling and go send Kaku the Astrologer here. Go, both, I weary of the sight of your ugly faces."

The girl rose, and with her fellow slave ran swiftly to the ladder that led to the waist of the ship.

"He called me a cat," Merytra hissed through her white teeth to her companion. "Well, if so, Sekhet, the cat-headed, is my godmother, and she is the Lady of Vengeance."

"Yes," answered the other, "and he said that we were both ugly—we, whom every lord who comes near the court admires so much! Oh! I wish a holy crocodile would eat him, black pig!"

"Then why don't they buy us? Abi would sell his daughters, much more his fan-bearers—at a price."

"Because they hope to get us for nothing, my dear; and, what is more, if I can manage it one of them shall, for I

am tired of this life. Have your fling while you can, I say. Who knows at which corner Osiris, Lord of Death, is waiting."

"Hush!" whispered Merytra, "there is that knave of an astrologer, and he looks cross, too."

Then, hand in hand, they went to this lean and learned man and humbly bowed themselves before him.

"Master of the stars," said Merytra, "we have a message for you. No, do not look at my cheek, please, the marks are not magical, only those of the divine fingers of the glorious hand of the most exalted Prince Abi, son of the Pharaoh happily ruling in Osiris, etc., etc., etc., of the right, royal blood of Egypt—that is on one side, and on the other of a divine lady whom Khem the Spirit, or Ptah the Creator, thought fit to dip in a vat of black dye."

"Hem!" said Kaku, glancing nervously over his shoulder. Then, seeing that there was no one near, he added, "you had better be careful what you say, my dear. The royal Abi does not like to hear the color of his late mother defined so closely. But why did he slap your face?"

She told him.

"Well," he answered, "if I had been in his place I would rather have kissed it, for it is pretty, decidedly pretty," and this learned man forgot himself so far as to wink at Merytra.

"There, sister," said the girl, "I always told you that rough shells have sweet nuts inside of them. Thank you for your compliment, master of learning. Will you tell us our fortune for nothing?"

"Yes, yes," he answered; "at least the fee I want will cost you nothing. Now stop this nonsense," he added anxiously, "I gather that *he* is cross."

"I never saw him worse, Kaku. I am glad it is you who read the stars, not I. Listen!"

As she spoke an angry roar reached them from the high deck above.

"Where is that accursed astrologer?" said the roar.

"What did I tell you? Never mind the rest of the papers; go at once. Your robe is full of rolls as it is."

"Yes," answered Kaku as he ran to

the ladder, "but the question is, how will he like what is in the rolls?"

"The gods be with you!" cried one of the girls after him, "you will need them all."

"And if you get back alive, don't forget your promise about the fortunes," said the other.

A minute later this searcher of the heavens, a tall, hook-nosed, man was prostrating himself before Abi in his pavilion on the upper deck, so low that his Syrian-shaped cap fell from his bald head.

"Why were you so long in coming?" asked Abi.

"Because your slaves could not find me, royal Son of the Sun. I was at work in my cabin."

"Indeed, I thought I heard them giggling with you down there. What did you call me? Royal Son of the Sun? That is Pharaoh's name! Have the stars shown you—" and he looked at him eagerly.

"No, prince, not exactly that. I did not think it needful to search them on a matter which seems established, more or less."

"More or less," answered Abi gloomily. "What do you mean by your 'more or less'? Here am I at the turning-point of my fortunes, not knowing whether I am to be Pharaoh of the Upper and Lower Lands, or only the petty lord of a city and a few provinces in the Delta, and you satisfy my hunger for the truth with an empty dish of 'more or less.' Man, what do you mean?"

"If your majesty will be pleased to tell his servant exactly what you desire to know, perhaps I may be able to answer the question," replied Kaku humbly.

"Majesty! Well, I desire to know by what warrant you call me 'majesty,' who am only Prince of Memphis. Did the stars give it to you? Have you obeyed me and asked them of the future?"

"Certainly, certainly. How could I disobey? I observed them all last night, and have been working out the results till this moment; indeed, they are not yet finished: Question and I will answer."

"You will answer, yes, but what will you answer? Not the truth, I fancy, because you are a coward, though if any

one can read the truth, it is you. Man," he added fiercely, "if you dare to lie to me I will cut your head off and take it to Pharaoh as a traitor's; and your body shall lie, not in that fine tomb which you have made, but in the belly of a crocodile whence there is no resurrection. Do you understand?"

"Let us come to the point. Look, the sun sets there behind the Tombs of the Kings, where the departed Pharaohs of Egypt take their rest till the Day of Awakening? It is a bad omen for me, I know, who wished to reach this city in the morning when Ra was in the House of Life, the East, and not in the House of Death, the West; but that accursed wind sent by Typhon held me back, and I could not. Well, let us begin at the end which must come after all. Tell me, you reader of the heavens, shall I sleep at last in that valley?"

"I think so, prince; at least, so says your planet. Look, yonder, it springs to life above you," and he pointed to an orb that appeared at the topmost edge of the red glow of the sunset.

"You are keeping something back from me," said Abi, searching Kaku's face with his fierce eyes. "Shall I sleep in the tomb of Pharaoh, in my own everlasting house that I shall have made ready to receive me?"

"Son of Ra, I cannot say," answered the astrologer. "Divine One, I will be frank with you. Though you be wroth, yet will I tell you the truth as you command me. An evil influence is at work in your House of Life. Another star crosses and recrosses your path, and though for a long time you seem to swallow it up, yet at the last it eclipses you—it and one that goes with it."

"What star?" asked Abi hoarsely. "Pharaoh's?"

"Nay, prince, the star of Amen."

"Amen! What Amen?"

"Amen the god, prince, the mighty father of the gods."

"Amen the god," repeated Abi in an awed voice. "How can a man fight against a god?"

"Say rather against two gods, for with the star of Amen goes the star of Hathor, Queen of Love. Not for many periods of thousands of years have they been together, but now they draw near

to each other, and so will remain for all your life. Look," and Kaku pointed to the eastern horizon where a faint rosy glow still lingered reflected from the western sky.

As they watched, this glow melted, and there in the pure heavens just where it met the distant land, appeared a bright and beautiful star, and so close to it that they almost touched a twin star.

For a few minutes only were they seen; then they vanished beneath the line of the horizon.

"The morning star of Amen, and with it the star of Hathor," said the astrologer.

"Well, fool, what of it?" exclaimed Abi. "They are far enough from my star. Moreover, it is they that sink, not I, who ride higher every moment."

"Aye, prince, but in a year to come they will certainly eclipse that star of yours. Prince, Amen and Rathor are against you. Look, I will show you their journeyings on this scroll, and you shall see where they eat you up yonder; yes, yonder over the valley of dead kings though twenty years and more must go by ere then, and take this for your comfort, during those years you shine alone," and he began to unfold a papyrus roll.

Abi snatched it from him, crumpled it up and threw it in his face.

"You cheat!" he said. "Do you think to frighten me with this nonsense about stars? Here is my star," and he drew the short sword at his side and shook it over the head of the trembling Kaku. "This sharp bronze is the star I follow, and be careful lest it should eclipse *you*, you father of lies."

"I have told the truth as I see it," answered the poor astrologer with some dignity, "but if you wish, O prince, that in the future I should indeed prophesy pleasant things to you, why, it can be done easily enough. Moreover, it seems to me that this horoscope of yours is not so evil, seeing that it gives to you over twenty years of life and power, more by far than most men can expect—at your age. If after that come troubles and the end, what of it?"

"That is so," replied Abi mollified. "It was my ill-temper. Everything has gone wrong to-day. Well, a gold cup, my own, shall pay the price of it. Bear

me no ill-will, I pray you, learned scribe, and above all tell me no falsehood as the message of the stars you serve. It is the truth I seek, the truth. If only she may be seen, and clasped, I care not how ill-favored is her face."

Rejoicing at the turn which things had taken, and especially at the promise of the priceless cup which he had long coveted, Kaku bowed obsequiously.

He picked up his crumpled roll and was about to retire when, through the gloom of the falling night, some men mounted upon asses were seen riding over the mud flats that border the Nile at this spot, toward the bank where the ship was moored.

"The captain of my guard," said Abi, who saw the starlight gleam upon a bronze helmet, "who brings me Pharaoh's answer. Nay, go not, hide and hear it, Kaku, and give us your counsel on it, your true counsel."

So the astrologer stood aside and waited, till presently the captain appeared saluting.

"What says Pharaoh, my brother?" asked the prince.

"Lord, he says that he will receive you, though as he did not send for you, he thinks that you can scarcely come upon any necessary errand, as he has heard long ago of your victory over the desert-dwelling barbarians, and does not want the offering of the salted heads of their officers which you bring to him."

"Good," said Abi contemptuously. "The divine Pharaoh was ever a woman in such matters, as in others. Let him be thankful that he has generals who know how to make war and to cut off the heads of his enemies in defense of the kingdom. We will wait upon him to-morrow."

"Lord," added the captain, "that is not all Pharaoh's message. He says that it has been reported to him that you are accompanied by a guard of three hundred soldiers. These soldiers he refuses to allow within the gates. He directs that you shall appear before his majesty attended by five persons only."

"Indeed," answered Abi with a scornful laugh. "Does Pharaoh fear, then, lest I should capture him and his armies and the great city with three hundred soldiers?"

"No, prince," answered the captain bluntly; "but I think he fears lest you should kill him and declare yourself Pharaoh as next of blood."

"Ah!" said Abi, "as next of blood. Then I suppose that there are still no children at the court?"

"None, O prince. I saw Ahura, the royal wife, the Lady of the Two Lands, that fairest of women, and other lesser wives and beautiful slave girls without number, but never a one of them had an infant on her breast or at her knee. Pharaoh remains childless."

"Ah!" said Abi again. Then he walked forward out of the pavilion whereof the curtains were drawn back, and stood a while upon the prow of the vessel.

By now night had fallen, and the great moon, rising from the earth as it were, poured her flood of silver light over the desert, the mountains, the limitless city of Thebes, and the wide, rippling bosom of the Nile. The pylons and obelisks, glittering with copper and with gold, towered to the tender sky. In the window-places of palaces and of ten thousand homes lamps shone like stars. From gardens, streets, and the courts of temples floated the faint sound of singing and of music, while on the great embattled walls the watchmen called the hour from post to post.

It was a wondrous scene, and the heart of Abi swelled as he gazed upon it. What wealth lay yonder, and what power. There was the glorious house of his brother, Pharaoh, the god in human form who for all his godship had never a child to follow after him when he ascended to Osiris, as he, who was sickly probably must do before so very long.

But before then a miracle might happen. In this way or in that a successor to the throne might be found and acknowledged, for were not Pharaoh and his house beloved by all the priests of Amen, and by the people, and was not he, Abi, feared and disliked because he was fierce, and the hated savage blood flowed in his veins? What evil god had put it in his father's heart to give him a princess of the Hyksos for a mother, the Hyksos, whom the Egyptians loathed, when he had the fairest women

of the world from whom to choose? Well, it was done and could not be undone, though because of it he might lose his heritage of the greatest throne in all the earth. Also, was it not to this fierce Hyksos blood that he owed his strength and vigor?

Why should he wait? Why should he not set his fortune on a cast? He had three hundred soldiers with him, picked men and brave, children of the sea and the desert, sworn to his house and interests. It was a time of festival, those gates were ill-guarded. Why should he not force them at the dead of night, make his way to the palace, cause Pharaoh to be gathered to his fathers, and at the dawn discover himself seated upon Pharaoh's throne?

At the thought of it Abi's heart leaped in his breast, his wide nostrils spread themselves, and he erected his strong head as though already he felt upon it the weight of the double crown. Then he turned and walked back to the pavilion.

"I am minded to strike a blow," he said. "Say now, my officer, would you and the soldiers follow me into the heart of yonder city to-night to win a throne—or a grave? If it were the first, you should be the general of all my army, and you, astrologer, should become vizier; yes, after Pharaoh you two should be the greatest men in all the land."

They looked at him and gasped.

"A venturesome deed, prince," said the captain at length; "yet with such a prize to win I think that I would dare it, though for the soldiers I cannot speak. First, they must be told what is on foot, and out of so many, how know we that the heart of one or more would not fail? A word from a traitor and before this time to-morrow the embalmers, or the jackals, would be busy."

Abi heard and looked from him to his companion.

"Prince," said Kaku, "put such thoughts far from you. Bury them deep. Let them rise no more. In the heavens I read something of this business, but then I did not understand. Now I see the black depths of hell opening beneath our feet. Yes, hell would be our home if we dared to lift hand against

the divine person of the Pharaoh. I say that the gods themselves would fight against us. Let it be, prince, let it be and you shall have many years of rule, who, if you strike now, will win nothing but a crown of shame, a nameless grave, and the everlasting torments of the damned."

As he spoke Abi considered the man's face and saw that all craft had left it. This was no charlatan that spoke to him, but one in earnest, who believed what he said.

"So be it," he answered. "I accept your judgment, and will wait upon my fortune. Moreover, you are both right, the thing is too dangerous, and evil often falls on the heads of those who shoot arrows at a god, especially if they have not enough arrows. Let Pharaoh live on while I make ready. Perhaps to-morrow I may work upon him to name me his heir."

The astrologer sighed in relief, nor did the captain seem disappointed.

"My head feels firmer on my shoulders than it did just now," he said; "and doubtless there are times when wisdom is better than valor. Sleep well, prince. Pharaoh will receive you to-morrow, two hours after sunrise. Have we your leave to retire?"

"If I were wise," said Abi, fingering the hilt of his sword as he spoke, "you would both of you retire for ever who know all the secrets of my heart, and with a whisper could bring doom upon me."

Now the pair looked at each other with frightened eyes, and, like his master, the captain began to play with his sword.

"Life is sweet to all men, prince," he said significantly, "and we have never given you cause to doubt us."

"No," answered Abi: "had it been otherwise I should have struck first and spoken afterward. Only you must swear, by the oath which may not be broken, that in life or death no word of this shall pass your lips."

So they swore, both of them, by the holy name of Osiris, the judge and the redeemer.

"Captain," said Abi, "you have served me well. Your pay is doubled.

and I confirm the promise that I made to you—should I ever rule yonder you shall be my general.”

While the soldier bowed his thanks, the prince said to Kaku:

“Master of the stars, my gold cup is yours. Is there aught else of mine that you desire?”

“That slave,” answered the learned man, “Merytra, whose ears you boxed just now—”

“How do you know that I boxed her ears?” asked Abi quickly. “Did the stars tell you that also? Well, I am tired of the sly hussy—take her. Soon I think she will box yours.”

But when Kaku sought Merytra to tell her the glad tidings that she was his, he could not find her.

Merytra had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROMISE OF THE GOD.

IT was morning at Thebes, and the great city glowed in the rays of the new-risen sun. In a royal barge sat Abi the prince, splendidly apparelled, and with him Kaku, his astrologer, his captain of the guard and three other of his officers, while in a second barge followed slaves who escorted two chiefs and some fair women captured in war, also the chests of salted heads and hands, offerings to Pharaoh.

The white-robed rowers bent to their oars, and the swift boat shot forward up the Nile through a double line of ships of war, all of them crowded with soldiers. Abi looked at these ships which Pharaoh had gathered there to meet him, and thought to himself that Kaku had given wise counsel when he prayed him to attempt no rash deed, for against such surprises clearly Pharaoh was well prepared.

He thought it again when on reaching the quay of cut stones he saw foot and horsemen marshaled in companies and squadrons, and on the walls above hundreds of other men, all armed. He saw what would have happened to him, if with his little desperate band he had tried to pierce that iron ring of soldiery.

At the steps generals met him in their mail and priests in their full robes, bow-

ing and doing him honor. Thus royally escorted, Abi passed through the open gates and the pylons of the splendid temple dedicated to the Trinity of Thebes, “the House of Amen in the Southern Apt.” where gay banners fluttered from pointed masts, up the long street bordered with tall houses set in gardens, till he came to the palace wall.

Here more guards rolled back the brazen gates which in his folly of a few hours gone he had thought that he could force, and through the avenues of blooming trees he was led to the great pillared hall of audience.

After the brightness without, that hall seemed almost dark, only a ray of sunlight flowing from an unshuttered space in the clerestory above, fell full on the end of it, and revealed the crowned Pharaoh and his queen seated in state upon their thrones of ivory and gold.

Gathered round and about him also were scribes and councilors and captains, and beyond these other queens in their carved chairs and attended, each of them, by beautiful women of the household in their gala dress. Moreover, behind the thrones, and at intervals between the columns, stood the famous Nubian guard of two hundred men, the servants of the body of Pharaoh as they were called, each of them chosen for faithfulness and courage.

The center of all this magnificence was Pharaoh. On him the sunlight beat, to him every eye was turned, and where his glance fell there heads bowed and knees bent. A small, thin man of about forty years of age with a puckered, kindly and anxious face, and a brow that seemed to sink beneath the weight of the double crown that, save for its royal snake-crest of hollow gold, was after all but of linen, a man with thin, nervous hands which played among the embroideries of his golden robe—such was Pharaoh, the mightiest monarch in the world, the ruler whom millions that had never seen him worshipped as a god.

Abi—the burly framed, thick-lipped, dark-skinned, round-eyed Abi—born of the same father, stared at him with wonderment, for years had passed since last they met, and in the palace when they were children a gulf had been set be-

tween the offspring of a royal mother and the child of a Hyksos concubine, taken into the household for reasons of state.

In his vigor, and the might of his manhood, he stared at this weakling, the son of a brother and a sister, and the grandson of a brother and a sister. Yet there was something in that gentle eye, an essence of inherited royalty, before which his rude nature bowed. The body might be contemptible, but within it dwelt the proud spirit of the descendant of a hundred kings.

Abi advanced to the steps of the throne and knelt there, till after a little pause Pharaoh stretched out the scepter in his hand for him to kiss. Then he spoke in his light, quick voice.

"Welcome, prince and my brother," he said. "We quarreled long ago, did we not? and many years have passed since we met; but time heals all wounds and—welcome, welcome, son of my father. I need not ask if you are well," and he glanced enviously at the great-framed man who knelt before him.

"Hail to your divine majesty!" answered Abi in his deep voice. "Health and strength be with you, Holder of the Scourge of Osiris, Wearer of the Feathers of Amen, Mortal crowned with the glory of Ra!"

"I thank you, prince," answered Pharaoh gently; "and that health and strength I need, who fear that I shall only find them when I have yielded up the Scourge of Osiris whereof you spoke to him who lent it me. But enough of myself. Let us to business: afterward we will talk of such matters together. Why have you left your government at Memphis without leave asked, to visit me here in my City of the Gates?"

"Be not wrath with me," answered Abi humbly. "A while ago, in obedience to your divine command, I attacked the barbarians who threatened your dominions in the desert. Like Menthu, god of war, I fell upon them. I took them by surprise, I smote them, thousands of them bit the dust before me. Two of their kings I captured with their women—they wait without, to be slain by your majesty. I bring with me the heads of a hundred of their captains and

the hands of five hundred of their soldiers, in earnest of the truth of my word. Let them be spread out before you. I report to your divine majesty that those barbarians are no more; that for a generation, at least, I have made the land safe to your uttermost dominions in the north. Suffer that the heads and the hands be brought in and counted out before your majesty, that the smell of them may rise like incense to your divine nostrils."

"No, no," said Pharaoh, "my officers shall count them without, for I love not such sights of death, and I take your word for the number. What payment do you ask for this service, my brother? for with great gifts would I reward you, who have done so well for me and Egypt?"

Before he answered, Abi looked at the beautiful queen, Ahura, who sat at Pharaoh's side, and at the other royal consorts and women.

"Your majesty," he said, "I see here many wives and ladies, but the royal children I do not see. Grant—for doubtless they are in their own chambers—grant, O Pharaoh, that they may be led hither that my eyes may feed upon their loveliness, and that I may tell of them—each of them—to their cousins who await me at Memphis."

At these words a flush as of shame spread itself over the lovely face of Ahura, the royal wife, the Lady of the Two Lands; while the women turned their heads away, whispering to each other bitterly, for the insult hurt them.

Only Pharaoh set his pale face and answered with dignity:

"Prince Abi, to affront those whom the gods have smitten, be they kings or peasants, is an unworthy deed which the gods will not forget. You know well that I have no children. Why, then, do you ask me to show you their loveliness?"

"I had heard rumors, O Pharaoh," answered the prince, "no more. Indeed, I did not believe them, for where there are so many wives I was certain that there would be some mothers. Therefore, I asked to be sure before I proffered a petition which now I will make to you—not for my own sake, but for Egypt's and yours, O Pharaoh. Have I your leave to speak here in public?"

"Speak on," said Pharaoh sternly. "Let aught that is for the welfare of Egypt be heard by Egypt."

"Your majesty has told me," replied Abi, bowing, "that the gods, being wrath, have denied you children. Not so much as one girl of your blood have they given to you to fill your throne when in due season it pleases you to depart to Osiris. Were it otherwise—were there even but a single woman-child of your divine race—I would say nothing. I would be silent as the grave. But so it is, and though your queens be fair and many, so it would seem that it must remain, since the ears of the gods having been deaf to your pleadings for so long, although you have built them glorious temples and made them offerings without count, will scarcely now be opened. Even Amen, your father—Amen, whose name you bear—will perform no miracle for you, O Pharaoh, who are so great that he has decreed that you shall shine alone, like the full moon at night, not sharing your great glory with a single star."

Now Ahura, the queen, who all this while had been listening intently, spoke for the first time in a quick, angry voice, saying:

"How know you that, Prince of Memphis? Sometimes the gods relent, and that which they have withheld for a space they give. My lord lives, and I live, and a child of his may yet fill the throne of Egypt."

"It may be so, O Queen," said Abi, bowing; "and for my part I pray that it will be so, for who am I that I should know the purpose of the kings of heaven? If but one girl be born of you and Pharaoh, then I take back my words and give to you that title which for many years has been written falsely upon your thrones and monuments, the title of royal mother."

Now, Ahura would have answered again, for this sneering taunt stung her to the quick. But Pharaoh laid his hand upon her knee, and said:

"Continue, prince and brother. We have heard from you that which we already know too well—that I am childless. Tell us what we do not know, the desire of your heart which lies hid beneath all these words."

"Pharaoh, it is this—I am of your holy blood, sprung of the same divine father—"

"But of a mother who was not divine," broke in Ahura; "of a mother taken from a race that has brought many a curse upon Khem, as any mirror will show you, Prince of Memphis."

"Pharaoh," went on Abi, without heeding her, "you grow weak; heaven desires you, the earth melts beneath you. In the north and in the south many dangers threaten Egypt. Should you die suddenly without an heir, barbarians will flow in from the north and from the south, and the great ones of the land will struggle for your place. Pharaoh, I am a warrior; I am strong; my children are many; my house is built upon a rock; the army trusts me; the millions of the people love me. Take me, then, to rule with you, and in the hearing of all the earth name me and my sons as your successors, so that our royal race may continue for generation after generation. So shall you end your days in peace and hope. I have spoken."

Now, as the meaning of this bold request sank into their hearts, all the court there gathered gasped and whispered, while the Queen Ahura, in her anger, crushed the lotus flower which she held in her hand and cast it to the floor. Only Pharaoh sat still and silent, his head bent and his eyes shut as though in prayer. For a minute or more he sat thus; and when he lifted his pale, pure face, there was a smile upon it.

"Abi, my brother," he said in his gentle voice, "listen to me. There are those who filled this throne before me, who, on hearing such words, would have pointed to you with their scepters; whereon, Abi, those lips of yours would have grown still forever, and you and your name and the names of all your house would have been blotted out by death. But, Abi, you were ever bold, and I forgive you for laying open the thoughts of your heart to me. Still, Abi, you have not told us all of them. You have not told us, for instance," he went on slowly, and in the midst of an intense silence, "that but last night you debated whether it would not be possible with that guard of yours to break into my palace and put me to the sword and name

yourself Pharaoh—by right of blood, Abi; yes, by right of blood—my blood shed by you, my brother."

As these words left the royal lips a tumult arose in the hall, the women and the great officers sprang up, the captains stepped forward, drawing their swords to avenge so horrible a sacrilege. But Pharaoh waved his scepter, and they were still, only Abi cried in a great voice:

"Who has dared to whisper a lie so monstrous?"

And he glared first at Kaku, and then at the captain of his guard, who stood behind him, and choked in wrath, or fear, or both.

"Suspect not your officers, prince," went on the Pharaoh, still smiling, "for on my royal word they are innocent. Yet, Abi, a pavilion set upon the deck of a ship is no good place to plot the death of kings. Pharaoh has many spies. Also at times, the gods, to whom, as you say, he is so near, whisper tidings to him in his sleep. Suspect not your officers, Abi: although I think that to yonder master of the stars who stands behind you, I should be grateful, since, had you attempted to execute this madness, but for him I might have been forced to kill you, Abi, as one kills a snake that creeps beneath his mat. Astrologer, you shall have a gift from me, for you are a wise man. It may take the place, perhaps, of one that you have lost; was it not a certain woman slave whom your master gave to you last night—after he had punished her for no fault?"

Kaku prostrated himself before the glory of Pharaoh, understanding at last that it was the lost girl, Merytra, who had overheard and betrayed them. But, needing him no more, his majesty went on:

"Abi, prince and brother, I forgive you a deed that you purposed, but did not attempt. May the gods and the spirits of our fathers forgive you also, if they will. Now, as to your demand. You are my only living brother, and therefore I will weigh it. Perchance, if I should die without issue, although you are not all royal—although there flows in your veins a blood that Egypt hates—although you could plot the murder of your lord and king, it may be well that when I am gone you should fill my place;

for you are brave, and of the ancient race on one side, if base-born on the other. But I am not yet dead, and children may still come to me. Abi, will you be a prisoner until Osiris calls me, or will you swear an oath?"

"I will swear an oath," answered the prince hoarsely, for he knew his shame and danger.

"Then kneel here, and by the dreadful Name swear that you will lift no hand and plot no plot against me. Swear that if a child—male or female—should be given to me, you will serve such a child truly, as your lord and lawful Pharaoh. In the presence of all this company, swear, knowing that if you break the oath in letter or in spirit, then all the gods of Egypt shall pour their curse upon your head in life, and in death shall give you over to the everlasting torments of the damned."

So, having little choice, Abi swore by the Name and kissed the scepter in token of his oath.

It was night. Dark and solemn was the innermost shrine of the vast temple, the "House of Amen in the Northern Apt," which we call Karnak, the very holy of holies where, fashioned of stone, and with the feathered crown upon his head, stood the statue of Amen-ra, father of the gods.

Here, where none but the high priest and the royalties of Egypt might enter, Pharaoh and his wife Ahura, wrapped in brown cloaks like common folk, knelt at the feet of the god and prayed. With tears and supplications did they pray that a child might be given to them.

There, in the sacred place, lit only by a single lamp, which burned from age to age, they told the story of their grief, while high above them the cold, calm countenance of the god seemed to stare through the gloom, as for a thousand years, in joy or sorrow, it had stared at those that went before them.

They told of the mocking words of Abi, who had demanded to see their children, the children that were not; they told of their terror of the people, who demanded that an heir should be declared; they told of the doom that threatened their ancient house, which from Pharaoh to Pharaoh, all of one

blood, for generations had worshiped in this place. They promised gifts and offerings, stately temples and wide lands, if only their desire might be fulfilled.

"Let me no more be made a mock among men," cried the beautiful queen, beating her forehead upon the stone feet of the god. "Let me bear a child to fill the seat of my lord the king; and then, if thou wilt, take my life in payment."

But the god made no answer; and, wearied at length, they rose and departed.

At the door of the sanctuary they found the high priest awaiting them, a wizened, aged man.

"The god gave no sign, O high priest," said Pharaoh sadly. "No voice spoke to us."

The old priest looked at the weeping queen, and a light of pity crept into his eyes.

"To me, watching without," he said, "a voice seemed to speak, though what it said I may not reveal. Go to your palace now, O Pharaoh, and O Queen Ahura, and take your rest side by side. I think that in your sleep a sign will come to you, for Amen is pitiful, and loves his children who love him. According to that sign, so speak to the Prince Abi; speak without fear or doubt, since for good or ill it shall be fulfilled."

Then, like shadows, hand in hand, this royal pair glided down the vast, pillared halls till at the pylon gates, which were opened for them, they found their litters, and were borne along the great avenue of ram-headed sphinxes back to a secret door in the palace wall.

It was past midnight. Deep darkness and heavy silence lay upon Thebes, broken only by dogs howling at the stars and the occasional challenge of soldiers on the walls.

Side by side in their golden bed the wearied Pharaoh and his queen slept heavily. Presently Ahura woke. She started up in the bed; she stared at the darkness about her with frightened eyes; she stretched out her hand and, clasping Pharaoh by the arm, whispered, in a thrilling voice:

"Awake, awake! I have that which I must tell you!"

Pharaoh roused himself, for there was something in Ahura's voice which swept away the veils of sleep.

"What has chanced, Ahura?" he asked.

"O Pharaoh, I have dreamed a dream—if, indeed, it were but a dream. It seemed to me that the darkness opened, and that, standing in the darkness, I saw a glory which had neither shape nor form. Yet a voice spoke from the glory—a low, sweet voice, 'Queen Ahura, my daughter,' it said, 'I am that spirit to whom thou and thy husband did pray this night in the sanctuary of my temple. It seemed to both of you that your prayers remained unheard, yet it was not so, as my priest knew well. Queen Ahura, thou and Pharaoh, thy husband, have put your trust in me these many years, and not in vain. A daughter shall be given to thee and Pharaoh, and my spirit shall be in that child. She shall be beautiful and glorious as no woman was before her, for I clothe her with health and power and wisdom. She shall rule over the northern and the southern lands; yea, for many years the double crown shall rest upon her brow, and no king that went before her—and no king that follows after her—shall be more great in Egypt. Troubles and dangers shall threaten her; but the spirit that I give to her shall protect her in them all, and she shall tread her enemy beneath her feet. A royal lover shall come to her also; and she shall rejoice in his love, and from it shall spring many kings and princes. Neter-Tua, Morning Star, shall be her name, and high priestess of Amen—no less—shall be her office, for she is my child whom I have taken from heaven and sent down to earth: the child that I have given to Pharaoh and to thee, and I love her and appoint the good goddesses to be her companions, and command Osiris to receive her at the last.

"Behold, in token of these things, I lay my symbol on thy breast, and on her breast also shall that symbol be. When I lift it from thee, and thou dost open thine eyes, then awaken Pharaoh at thy side and let these my words be written in a roll, so that none of them are forgotten."

"Then, O Pharaoh," went on Ahura,

"from the glory there came forth a hand, and in the hand was the symbol of life, shining as though with fire, and the hand laid it upon my breast; and it burned me as though with fire, and I awoke, and lo! darkness was all about me—nothing but darkness—and at my side I heard you sleeping."

Now, when Pharaoh had listened to this dream, he kissed the queen and blessed her because of its good omen, and clapped his hands to summon the women of honor who slept without. They ran in, bearing lights; and by the lights he saw that beneath the throat of the queen, upon her fair skin, appeared a red mark, and the shape of it was the shape of the sign of life; yes, there was the loop, and beneath the loop the cross.

Then Pharaoh commanded that the chief of his scribes should come to him with papyrus and writing tools, and that the high priest of Amen should be brought swiftly from the temple.

So the scribe came to the bed-chamber of the king, and in the presence of the high priest all the words of Amen were written down; not one of them was omitted, and Pharaoh and the queen signed the roll; the high priest witnessed it, and, copies having been made, bore it away to the secret treasury of Amen.

But the mark of the cross of life remained upon the breast of the Queen Ahura till the day that she died.

Now, in the morning Pharaoh summoned his court and commanded that the Prince Abi should be brought before him. The prince came, and Pharaoh addressed him kindly.

"Son of my father," he said, "I have considered your request that I should take you to rule with me on the throne of Egypt, and name you and your sons to be Pharaohs after me, and it is refused. Know that it has been revealed to me and to the royal wife, Ahura, by the greatest of the gods, that a daughter shall be born to us in due season, who shall be called Morning Star of Amen, and that she and her seed shall be Pharaohs after me. Therefore, rejoice with us and return to your government, Prince Abi; and be happy in our love, and in the goods and greatness that the gods have given you."

Now, Abi shook with anger, for he thought that all this tale was a trick and a snare. But, knowing that his peril was great there in the hand of Pharaoh, he answered only that when this Morning Star arose, his star should do it reverence; though, as the words passed his lips, he remembered the prophecy of his astrologer, Kaku, that the Morning Star of Amen should blot out that star of his.

"You think that I speak falsely, Prince Abi; yes, that I stain my lips with lies," said Pharaoh with indignation. "Well, I forgive you this also. Go hence and await the issue, and know by this sign that truth is in my heart. When the Princess Neter-Tua is born, upon her breast shall be seen the symbol of the sign of life. Depart now, lest I grow angry. The gifts I have promised shall follow you to Memphis."

So Abi returned to the white-walled city of Memphis, and sat there sullenly, putting it about that a plot was on foot to deprive him of his heritage. But Kaku shook his head, saying in secret that the Star, Neter-Tua, would arise, for so it was decreed by Amen, father of the gods.

CHAPTER III.

RAMES, THE PRINCESS, AND THE CROCODILE.

AT the appointed time to Ahura, the royal wife, was born a child, a girl, with a fresh and lovely face and waving hair, and eyes that from the first were blue like the summer sky at even. Also, on her breast was a mole of the length of a finger-nail, which mole was shaped like the holy sign of life.

Now, Pharaoh and his house and the priests in every temple—and, indeed, all Egypt—went mad with joy, though there were many who in secret mourned over the sex of the infant, whispering that a man and not a woman should wear the double crown.

But in public they said nothing, since the story of this child had gone abroad and folk declared that it was sent by the gods, and divine, and that the goddesses, Isis, Nephtys, and Hathor, with Khemu, the Maker of Mankind, were seen in the birth-chamber, glowing like gold.

Also, Pharaoh issued a decree that wherever the name of the Queen Ahura was graven in all the land, to it should be added the title "By the will of Amen, Mother of his Morning Star," and that a new hall should be built in the temple of Amen in the Northern Apt, and all about it carved the story of the coming of Prince Abi and of the vision of the queen.

But Ahura never lived to see this glorious place, since from the hour of her daughter's birth she began to sink. On the fourteenth day, the day of purification, she bade the nurse bring the beautiful babe, and gazed at it long and blessed it, and spoke with the Ka, or double of the child, which she said she saw lying on her arm beside it, bidding that Ka protect it well through the dangers of life and death until the hour of resurrection.

Then she said that she heard Amen calling to her to pay the price which she had promised for the gift of the divine child, the price of her own life, and smiled upon Pharaoh, her husband, and died happily with a radiant face.

Now, joy was turned to mourning; and during all the days of embalming Egypt wept for Ahura until, at length, the time came when her body was rowed across the Nile to the splendid tomb which she had made ready in the Valley of the Queens, causing masons and artists to labor at it without cease.

For Ahura knew from the day of her vision that she was doomed to die, and remembered that the tombs of the dead remain as the live hands leave them, since few waste gold and toil upon the eternal house of one who is dead.

So Ahura was buried with great pomp and all her jewels; and Pharaoh, who mourned her truly, made splendid offerings in the chapel of her tomb; and, having laid in the mouth of it the funeral-boat, in which she was borne across the Nile, he built it up forever and poured sand over the rock, so that none should find its place until the day of awakening.

Meanwhile, the infant grew and flourished, and when it was six months old was taken to the college of the priestesses of Amen, there to be reared and taught.

On the day of the birth of the Princess Neter-Tua, there happened another birth with which our story has to do. The captain of the guard of the temple of Amen was one Mermes, who had married his own half-sister, Asti, the enchantress.

As was well known, this Mermes was by right and true descent the last of that house of Pharaohs which had filled the throne of Egypt until their line was cast down generations before by the dynasty that now ruled the land, whereof the reigning Pharaoh and his daughter, Neter-Tua, alone remained. A long while past, in the early days of his reign, his council had whispered in Pharaoh's ear that he should kill Mermes and his sister, lest a day should come when they rebelled against him, proclaiming that they did so by right of blood.

But Pharaoh, who was gentle and hated murder, instead of slaying Mermes, sent for him and told him all.

Then Mermes, a noble-looking man, as became the stock from which he sprang, prostrated himself and said:

"O Pharaoh, why should you kill me? It has pleased the gods to debase my house and to set up yours. Have I ever lifted up my heel against you because my forefathers were kings, or plotted with the discontented to overthrow you? See, I am satisfied with my station, which is that of a noble and a soldier in your army. Therefore, let me and my half-sister, the wise Lady Asti whom I purpose to marry, dwell on in peace as your true and humble servants. Dip not your hands in our innocent blood, O Pharaoh, lest the gods send a curse upon you and your house, and our ghosts come back from the grave to haunt you."

When Pharaoh heard these words, his heart was moved in him, and he stretched out his scepter for Mermes to kiss, thereby granting to him life and protection.

"Mermes," he said, "you are an honorable man, and my equal in blood if not in place. For their own purposes the gods raise up one and cast down another, that at last their ends may be fulfilled. I believe that you will work no harm against me and mine, and, therefore, I will work no harm against you and your sister Asti, Mistress of Magic. Rather shall you be my friend and counselor."

Then Pharaoh offered high rank and office to him, but Mermes would not take them, answering that if he did, envy would be stirred up against him, and in this way or in that bring him to his death, since tall trees are the first to fall.

So in the end Pharaoh made Mermes captain of the guard of Amen, and gave him land and houses enough to enable him to live as a noble of good estate, but no more. Also he became the friend of Pharaoh and one of his inner council, to whose voice he always listened, for Mermes was a true-hearted man.

Afterward Mermes married Asti; but, like Pharaoh, for a long while he remained childless, since he took no other wives.

On the day of the birth of the Princess Tua, the Morning Star of Amen, however, Asti bore a son, a royal-looking child of great strength and beauty and very fair in color, as tradition said that the kings of his race had been before him, but with black and shining eyes.

"See," said the midwife, "here is a head shaped to wear a crown."

Whereon Asti, his mother, forgetting her caution in her joy, or perhaps inspired by the gods, for from her childhood she was a prophetess, answered:

"Yes, and I think that this head and a crown will come close together," and she kissed him and named him Rames, after her royal forefather, the founder of their line.

As it chanced, a spy overheard this saying and repeated it to the council, and the council urged Pharaoh to cause the boy to be put away, as they had urged in the case of his father, Mermes, because of the words of omen that Asti had spoken, and because she had given her son a royal name, naming him after the majesty of Ra, as though he were indeed the child of a king.

But Pharaoh would not, asking with his soft smile whether they wished him to baptize his daughter in the blood of another infant who drew his first breath upon the same day, and adding:

"Ra sheds his glory upon all, and this high-born boy may live to be a friend in need to her whom Amen has given to Egypt. Let things befall as the gods decree. Who am I that I should make

myself a god and destroy a life that they have fashioned?"

So the boy Rames lived and thrived, and Mermes and Asti, when they came to hear of these things, thanked Pharaoh and blessed him.

Now the house of Mermes, as captain of the guard, was within the wall of the great temple of Amen, near to the palace of the priestesses of Amen where the Princess Neter-Tua was nurtured. Thus it came about that when the Queen Ahura died, the lady Asti was named as nurse to the princess, since Pharaoh said that she should drink no milk save that of one in whose veins ran royal blood.

So Asti was Tua's foster mother, and night by night she slept in her arms together with her own son, Rames. Afterward, too, when they were weaned the babes were taught to walk and speak together, and later, as children, they became playmates.

Thus from the first these two loved each other, as brother and sister love when they are twins. But although the boy was bold and brave, this little princess always had the mastery of him, not because she was a princess and heir to the throne of Egypt—for all the high titles they gave her fell idly on her ears, nor did she think anything of the bowings of courtiers and of priests—but from some strength within herself. She it was that set the games they played, and when she talked he was obliged to listen, for although she was so sound and healthy, this Tua differed from other children.

Thus she had what she called her "silent hours" when she would suffer no one to come near her, not her ladies or her foster-mother, Asti herself, nor even Rames. Then, followed by the women at a distance, she would wander among the great columns of the temple and study the sculptures on the walls; and since all places were open to her, Pharaoh's child, enter the sanctuaries, and stare at the gods that sat in them, fashioned in granite and in alabaster. This she would do even in the solemn moonlight, when mortals were afraid to approach those sacred shrines, and come thence unconcerned and smiling.

"What do you see there, O Morning Star?" asked little Rames of her once. "They are dull things, those stone gods

that have never moved since the beginning of the world; also they frighten me, especially when Ra is set."

"They are not dull, and they do not frighten me," answered Tua; "they talk to me, and although I cannot understand all they say, I am happy with them."

"Talk!" he said contemptuously; "how can stones talk?"

"I do not know. I think it is their spirits that talk, telling me stories which happened before I was born, and that shall happen after I am dead—yes, and after *they* seem to be dead. Now, be silent—I say that they talk to me—it is enough."

"For me it would be more than enough," said the boy; "but, then, I am not called Child of Amen, who only worship Menthu, God of War."

When Rames was seven years of age, every morning he was taken to school in the temple, where the priests taught him to write with pens of reed upon tablets of wood, and told him more about the gods of Egypt than he ever wanted to hear again.

During these hours, except when she was being instructed by great ladies of the court, or by high priestesses, Tua was left solitary, since by the command of Pharaoh no other children were allowed to play with her, perhaps because there were none in the temple of her age whose birth was noble.

Once, when he came back from his school in the evening, Rames asked her if she had not been lonely without him. She answered, "No," as she had another companion.

"Who is it?" he asked jealously. "Show me, and I will fight him."

"No one that you can see, Rames," she replied. "Only my own Ka."

"Your Ka! I have heard of Kas, but I never saw one. What is it like?"

"Just like me, except that it throws no shadow, and only comes when I am quite by myself; and then, although I hear it often, I see it rarely, for it is mixed up with the light."

"I don't believe in Kas," exclaimed Rames scornfully. "You make them up out of your head."

A little while after this talk something happened that caused Rames to change

his mind about Kas, or, at any rate, the Ka of Tua.

In a hidden court of the temple was a deep pool of water, with cemented sides, where, it was said, lived a sacred crocodile, an enormous beast that had dwelt there for hundreds of years. Rames and Tua, having heard of this crocodile, often talked of it, and longed to see it, but could not, for there was a high wall round the tank, and in it a door of copper that was kept locked, except when once in every eight days the priests took in food to the crocodile—living goats and sheep, and sometimes a calf, none of which ever came back again.

One day Rames, watching them return, saw the priest, who was called guardian of the door, put his hand behind him to thrust the key with which he had just locked the door, into his wallet, and, missing the mouth of the wallet, let it fall upon the sand, then go upon his way knowing nothing of what he had done.

When he had gone in a great hurry, for he was a fat old priest, and the dinner-hour was at hand, Rames pounced upon the key and hid it in his robe. Then he sought out the princess and said:

"Morning Star, this evening, when I come back from school and am allowed to play with you, we can look at the wonderful beast in the tank, for look, I have the key which that fat priest will not search for till seven days are gone by, before which I can take it to him, saying that I found it in the sand, or perhaps put it back into his wallet."

When she heard this Tua's eyes shone, since above all things she desired to see this holy monster. But in the evening, when the boy came running to her eagerly—for he had thought of nothing but the crocodile all day, and had bought a pigeon from a school-fellow with which to feed the brute—he found Tua in a different mood.

"I don't think that we will go to see the holy crocodile, Rames," she said, looking at him thoughtfully.

"Why not?" he asked, amazed. "There is no one about, and I have put fat upon the key so that it will make no noise."

"Because my Ka has been with me, Rames, and told me that it is a bad act, and if we do trouble will come to us."

"Oh, may the fiend Set take your Ka!" replied the lad in a rage. "Show it to me, and I will talk with it."

"I cannot, Rames, for it is *me*. Moreover, if Set took it, he would take me also, and you are wicked to wish such a thing."

Now, the boy began to cry with vexation, sobbing out that she was not to be trusted, and that he had paid away his bronze knife, which Pharaoh gave him when last he visited the temple, for a pigeon to tempt the beast to the top of the water, so that they might see it, although the knife was worth many pigeons, and Pharaoh would be angry if he heard that he had parted with it.

"Why should we take the life of a poor pigeon to please ourselves?" asked Tua, softening a little at the sight of his grief.

"It's taken already," he answered. "It fluttered so that I had to sit on it to hide it from the priest, and when he had gone it was dead. Look," and he opened the linen bag he held, and showed her the dove, cold and stiff.

"As you did not mean to kill it, that makes a difference," said Tua judiciously. "Well, perhaps my Ka did not mean that we should not have one peep, and it is a pity to waste the poor pigeon, which then will have died for nothing."

Rames agreed that it would be the greatest of pities, so the two children slipped away through the trees of the garden into the shadow of the wall, along which they crept till they came to the bronze door.

Then, guiltily enough, Rames put the great key into the lock, and with the help of a piece of wood which he had also made ready, that he set in the ring of the key to act as a lever, the two of them, turning together, shot back the heavy bolts.

Taking out the key, lest it should betray them, they opened the door a little and squeezed themselves through into the forbidden place. No sooner had they done so than almost they wished themselves back again, for there was something about the spot that frightened them, to say nothing of the horrible smell which made Tua feel ill.

It was a great tank, with a little artificial island in its center, full of slimy water that looked almost black because

of the shadow of the high walls, and round it ran a narrow stone path. At one spot in this path, however, where grew some dank-looking trees and bushes, was a slope, also of stone, and on the slope, with its prow resting in the water, a little boat, and in the boat, oars. But of the crocodile there was nothing to be seen.

"It is asleep somewhere," whispered Tua. "Let us go away; I do not like this stench."

"Stench," answered Rames. "I smell nothing except the lilies on the water. Let us wake it up; it would be silly to go now. Surely you are not afraid, O Star."

"Oh, no, I am not afraid," answered Tua proudly. "Only wake it up quickly, please."

What Rames did not add was that it would now be impossible to retreat, as the door had closed behind them, and there was no keyhole on its inner side.

So they walked round the tank, but wherever it might lurk the sleeping crocodile refused to wake.

"Let us get into the boat and look for it," suggested Rames. "Perhaps it is hiding on the island."

So he led her to the stone slope, where, to her horror, Tua saw the remains of the crocodile's last meal, a sight that caused her to forget her doubts and jump into the boat very quickly. Rames gave it a push and sprang in after her, so that they found themselves floating on the water. Standing in the bow, the boy took an oar and paddled round the island. Still there were no signs of the crocodile.

"I don't believe it is here at all," he said, recovering his courage.

"You might try the pigeon," suggested Tua, who, now that there was less smell, felt her curiosity returning.

This was a good thought, upon which Rames acted at once. Taking the dead bird from the bag, he spread out its wings to make it look as though it were alive, and threw it into the water, exclaiming: "Arise, O Holy Crocodile!"

Then, with fearful suddenness, whence they knew not, that crocodile arose. An awful scaly head appeared, with dull eyes and countless flashing fangs, and behind the head cubit upon cubit of monstrous

form. The fangs closed upon the pigeon, and everything vanished.

"That was the Holy Crocodile," said Rames abstractedly, as he stared at the boiling waters, "which has lived here during the reigns of eight Pharaohs, and perhaps longer. Now we have seen it."

"Yes," answered Tua; "and I never want to see it again. Get me away quick, or I will tell your father."

Thus adjured, the boy, nothing loath, seized his oar, when suddenly the ancient crocodile, having swallowed the dove, thrust up its snout immediately beneath them and began to follow the boat. Tua screamed aloud, and said something about her Ka.

"Tell it to keep off the crocodile," shouted Rames, as he worked the oar furiously. "Nothing can hurt a Ka."

But the crocodile would not be kept off. On the contrary, it thrust its gray snout and one of its claws over the stern of the boat in such a fashion that Rames could no longer work the oar, dragging it almost under water, and snapped with its horrible jaws.

"Oh, it is coming in—we are going to be eaten," cried Tua.

At that moment the boat touched the landing-place and swung round, so that its bow, where Tua was, struck the head of the crocodile, which seemed to infuriate the beast.

It hurled itself upon the boat, causing the forepart to keel over, fill with water and begin to sink. Then the little lad, Rames, showed the courage that was in him. Shouting to Tua:

"Get on shore—get on shore!" he plunged past her and smote the huge reptile upon the head with the blade of his oar. It opened its hideous mouth, and he thrust the oar into it and held on.

"Leave go," cried Tua, as she scrambled to land.

But Rames would not leave go, for in his brave little heart he thought that if he did the crocodile would follow Tua and eat her. He clung to the handle till it was wrenched from him.

He did more, for seeing that the crocodile had bitten the wooden blade in two and, having dropped it, was still advancing toward the slope where it was accustomed to be fed, he leaped into the water and struck it in the eye with his

little fist. Feeling the pain of the blow, the monster snapped at him and, catching him by the hand, began to sink back into deep water, dragging the lad after it.

Rames said nothing, but Tua, who already was at the head of the stage, looking round, saw the agony on his face.

"Help me, Amen!" she cried, and, flying back, grasped Rames by his left arm just as he was falling over, then set her heels in a crack of the rock and held on. For one moment she was dragged forward till she thought that she must fall upon her face and be drowned or eaten with Rames, but the next something yielded, and she and the boy tumbled in a heap upon the stones.

They rose and staggered together to the terrace. As they went Tua saw that Rames was looking at his right hand curiously; also that it was covered with blood, and that the little finger was torn off it. Then she remembered nothing further, except a sound of shouts and of heavy hammering at the copper door.

When she recovered it was to find herself in the house of Mermes, with the Lady Asti bending over her and weeping.

"Why do you weep, nurse," she asked; "seeing that I am safe?"

"I weep for my son, princess," she answered, between her sobs.

"Is he dead of his wounds, then, Asti?"

"No, O Morning Star, he lies sick in his chamber. But soon Pharaoh will kill him because he led her who will be Queen of Egypt into great danger of her life."

"Not so," said Tua, springing up, "for he saved my life."

As she spoke the door opened, and in came Pharaoh himself, who had been summoned hastily from the palace. His face was white, and he shook with fear, for it had been reported to him that his only child was drowned. When he saw that she lived, and was not even hurt, he could not contain his joy, but casting his arms about her, sank to his knees, giving thanks to the gods and the guardian spirits. She kissed him and, studying his face with her wise eyes, asked why he was so much afraid.

"Because I thought you had been killed, my daughter."

"Why did you think that, O my father, seeing that the great god, Amen, before I was born promised to protect me always, though it is true that had it not been for Rames—"

At the mention of this name Pharaoh was filled with rage.

"Speak not of that wicked lad," he exclaimed, "now or evermore, for he shall be scourged till he dies."

"My father," answered Tua, springing up, "forget those words, for if Rames dies I will die also. It is I who am to blame, not he, for my Ka warned me not to look upon the beast, but to Rames no Ka spoke. Moreover, when that evil god would have eaten me it was Rames who fought with it and offered himself to its jaws in my place. Listen, my father, while I tell you all the story."

So Pharaoh listened, and when it was done he sent for Rames. Presently the boy was carried in, for he had lost so much blood that he could not walk, and was placed upon a stool before him.

"Slay me now, O Pharaoh," he said in a weak voice, "for I have sinned. Moreover, I shall die happy since my spirit gave me strength to beat off the evil beast from the princess whom I led into trouble."

"Truly you have done wickedly," said Pharaoh, shaking his head at him; "and, therefore, perhaps, you will lose your hand or even your life. Yet, child, you have a royal heart, who first saved your playmate and, then, even in my presence, take all the blame upon yourself. Therefore, I forgive you, son of Mermes; moreover, I see that I was wise not to listen to those who counseled that you should be put away at birth, and bending over the boy, Pharaoh kissed him on the brow.

Also he gave orders that the greatest physicians in the land should attend upon him and purge the poison of the crocodile's teeth from his body; and when he recovered—which save for the loss of the little finger of his right hand, he did completely—he sent him a sword with a handle of gold fashioned to the shape of a crocodile, in place of the knife which he had paid away for the pigeon, bidding him use it bravely all his life in defense of her who would be his queen. Further, although he was still

so young, he gave to him the high title of count in earnest of his love and favor, and with it a name that meant defender of the royal lady.

After he had gone, Asti, the prophetess, looked at the sword which Pharaoh had given to her son.

"I see royal blood on it," she said, and handed it back to Rames.

But Rames and Tua were no more allowed to play together alone, for always after this the princess was accompanied by women of honor and an armed guard. Also, within a year or two the boy was placed in charge of a general to be brought up as a soldier, a trade that he liked well enough, so that from this time forward he and Neter-Tua seldom met.

Still there was a bond between them which could not be broken by absence, for already they loved each other, and every night and morning, when Tua made her petitions to Amen, after praying for Pharaoh her father, and for the spirit of her royal mother, Ahura, she prayed for Rames, and that they might meet soon. For the months when her eyes did not fall upon his face were wearisome to Tua.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUMMONING OF AMEN.

THE years went by, and the Princess Neter-Tua, who was called Morning Star of Amen, came at length to womanhood, and went through the ceremonies of purification. In all Egypt there was no maiden so wise and spirited or so lovely. Tall and slender was her shape, blue as the sea were her eyes, rosy like the dawn were her cheeks, and when she did not wear it in a net of gold her black and curling hair fell almost to her waist.

Also she was very learned, for priests and priestesses taught her all things that she ought to know, together with the arts of playing on the harp and of singing and dancing, while her own excellent spirit, that Ka which Amen had given her, instructed her in a deeper wisdom which she gathered unconsciously in sleep and waking dreams, as the slumbering earth gathers dew at night.

Moreover, her father, the wise old Pharaoh, opened to her the craft of statesmanship, by help of which she might govern men and overthrow her enemies. Indeed, he did more, for when her education was finished he joined her with him in the government of Egypt, saying:

"I, who always lacked bodily strength, grow aged and feeble. This mighty crown is too heavy for me to bear alone. Daughter, you must share its weight."

So the young Neter-Tua became a queen, and great was the ceremony of her coronation. The high priests and priestesses, clothed in the robes and symbols of their gods and goddesses, addressed speeches to her and blessed her in their names, giving her every good gift and promising to her eternal life.

Princes and nobles made her offerings; foreign chiefs and kings bowed before her by their ambassadors. The counts and headmen of the two lands swore allegiance to her; and, finally, in the presence of all the court, Pharaoh himself set the double crown upon her brow and gave her her throne-names of "Glorious in Ra and Hathor Strong in Beauty."

For a while Tua sat splendid on her golden seat, while the people adored her, but in that triumphant hour her eyes searched for one face only, that of the tall and gallant captain, Rames, her foster-brother, and for a moment rested there content. Yes, their eyes met, those of the new-crowned queen on her throne and of the youthful noble in the throng below. Short was the greeting, for next instant she looked away, yet more full of meaning than whole days of speech.

"The queen does not forget what the child remembered, the goddess is still a woman," it seemed to say.

And so sweet was that message that Rames staggered from the court like one stricken by the sun.

Night came at last; and having dismissed her secretaries, scribes, and tire-women the weary girl, clad now in simple white, sat in her chamber alone. She thought of all the splendors through which she had passed; she thought of the glories of her imperial state, of the

power that she wielded, and of the proud future which stretched before her feet.

But most of all she thought of the face of the young Count Rames, the playmate of her childhood, the man she loved, and wondered if with all her power she could ever draw him to her side. If not, of what use was this rule over millions, this dominion of her world? They called her a goddess, and in truth, at times, she believed that she was half-divine; but if so, why did her heart ache like that of any common maid?

Moreover, was she really set above the misfortunes of her race? Could a throne, however bright with gold, lift her above the sorrows of human kind? She desired to learn the truth, the very truth. Her mind was urgent; it drove her on to search out things to come: to stand face to face with them, even if they were evil. She believed she had the strength, although, as yet, she had never called it to her aid.

Also, this thing could not be done alone. Tua thought a while, then going to the door of her chamber she bade a woman who waited without summon to her the Lady Asti, priestess of Amen, Interpreter of Heaven.

Presently Asti came, for now, as always, she was in attendance upon the new-crowned queen, a tall and noble-looking woman with fine-cut features and black hair that, although she was fifty years of age, still showed no trace of gray.

"I was in the sanctuary when your majesty summoned me," she said, pointing to the sacred robe she wore. "Let your majesty pardon me, therefore, if I have been long in coming," and she bowed low before her.

But the queen lifted her up and kissed her, saying:

"I weary of those high titles whereof I have heard more than enough to-day. Call me Tua. O my mother, for so you have ever been to me, from whose breast I drew the milk of life."

"What ails you, my child?" asked Asti. "Was the crown too heavy for this young head of yours?" she added, stretching out her delicate hand and stroking the black and curling hair.

"Aye, mother, the weight of it seemed

to crush me with its gems and gold. I am weary and yet I cannot sleep. Tell me, why did Pharaoh summon that council after the feast? Merimes was one of them, so you must know. And why was not I, who henceforth rule with Pharaoh, present with him?"

"Would you learn?" said Asti with a little smile. "Well, as queen you have the right. It was because they discussed the matter of your marriage."

For a moment a light shone upon Tua's face. Then she asked anxiously:

"My marriage, and with whom?"

"Oh! many names were mentioned, since she who rules Egypt does not lack for suitors."

"Tell me them quick, Asti."

So she told them; there were seven in all—the Prince of Kesh, the sons of foreign kings, great nobles, and a general of the army who claimed descent from a former Pharaoh.

As each name fell from Asti's lips, Tua waved her hand, saying scornful words, such as, "I know him not," "Too old," "Fat and hideous," "A foreign dog who spits upon our gods," and so forth, adding at last:

"Go on."

"That is all, lady; no other name was mentioned, and the council adjourned to consider these."

"No other name?"

"Do you, then, miss one—perchance, Tua?"

She made no answer; only her lips seemed to shape themselves to a certain sound that they did not utter. The two women looked each other in the eyes, then Asti shook her head.

"It may not be," she whispered, "for many reasons; and among them that, by the solemn decree of long ago whereof I have told you, our blood is barred forever from the throne. None would dare to break it, not even Pharaoh himself. You would not bring my son to his death, Tua, which such another look as you gave him in yonder hall would surely do."

"No," she answered. "I would not bring him to his death, but to life and honor and—love; and one day I shall be Pharaoh. Only, Asti, if you betray me to him, I will bring you to your death, although you are so dear."

"I shall not betray you," answered the priestess, smiling again. "In truth, most beautiful, I do not think there is any need, even if I would. Say, now, why did a certain captain turn faint and leave the hall to-day when your eyes chanced to fall on him?"

"The heat," suggested Tua, coloring.

"Yes, it was hot; but he is stronger than most men, and had borne it long—like others. Still, there are fires—"

"Because he was afraid of my majesty," broke in Tua hurriedly. "You know I looked very royal there, mother."

"Yes; doubtless fear moved him—or some other passion. Yet, beloved, put that thought from your heart as I do. When you are Pharaoh, you will learn that a monarch is a slave to the people and to the law. Breathe but his name in love, and never will you see him more till you meet before Osiris."

Tua hid her eyes in her hands for a moment, then she glanced up, and there was another look upon her face—a strange, new look.

"When I am Pharaoh," she answered, "there are certain matters in which I will be my own law; and if the people do not like it, they may find another Pharaoh."

Asti started at her words, and a light of joy shone in her deep eyes.

"Truly your heart is high," she said; "but, oh! if you love me—and another—bury that thought, bury it deep, or he will never live to see you placed alone upon the golden seat. Know, lady, that already from hour to hour I fear for him—lest he should drink a poisoned cup; lest at night he should chance to stumble against a spear; lest an arrow—shot in sport—should fall against his throat and none know whence it came."

Tua clenched her hands.

"If so, there should be such vengeance as Egypt has not heard of since Mena ruled."

"Of what use is vengeance, child, when the heart is empty and the tomb is sealed?"

Again Tua thought. Then she said:

"There are other gods besides Osiris. Now, what do men call me, mother? Nay, not my royal names."

"They call you Morning Star of

Amen; they call you Daughter of Amen."

"Is that story true. Asti the Magician?"

"Aye, at least your royal mother dreamed the dream, for she told it to me, and I have read its record, who am a priestess of Amen."

"Then this high god should love me, should he not? He should hear my prayers and give me power—he should protect those who are dear to me. Mother, they say that you, the mistress of secret things, can open the ears of the gods and cause their mouths to speak. Mother, I command you as your queen, call up my father Amen before me, so that I may talk with him, for I have words to which he must listen."

"Are you not afraid?" asked Asti, looking at her curiously. "He is the greatest of all the gods, and to summon him lightly is a sacrilege."

"Should a daughter fear her father?" answered T'ua.

"When the divine queen your mother

(To be continued.)

and Pharaoh knelt before him in his shrine, praying that a child might be given to them, Amen did not deign to appear to them, save afterward in a dream. Will you dare more than they? Lie down and dream, O Star of the Morning."

"Nay, I trust no dreams which change like summer clouds and pass as soon," answered the girl boldly. "If the god is my father, in the spirit or the flesh, I know not which, let him appear before me face to face. I ask his wisdom for myself and his favor for another. Call him, if you have the power. Asti. Call him even if he slay me. Better that I should die than—"

"Hush!" said Asti, laying her hand upon her lips; "speak not that name. Well, I have some skill, and for your sake—and another's—I will try, but not here. Perchance he may listen, perchance not, or, perchance, if he comes, you and I must pay the price. Put on your robes now, O queen, and over them this veil, and follow me—if you dare."

BOOSTING BRIGGS.

BY GUY OLIVER.

A SHORT STORY.



His hair was the color of Paderewski's, his head was the shape of Beethoven's—but he confided to me that he looked like father. I met him in Pittsburgh. I had just come in on a vacation-trip from a dinky little town out West, where I had a government job directing an orchestra in a soldiers' home.

As a musician, I was a false alarm. As a sign-painter is to Rembrandt, so was I to an artist. But I had a very violent and dangerous passion for the fiddle, and fiddle I would, if the heavens fell.

Somebody tipped it off to me that there

was a violin-teacher in town who was a pupil of César Thompson, the great Belgian master.

"A chance in a hundred," I thought. "I'll take a few lessons of him, and get some criticisms on my work."

I dropped into a music-store, found out his address, climbed on a car, and went out to his house.

Poor devil! That house spoke, positively yelled, his financial condition. His little front room, which was all I saw, was shabby to the limit. Bummy chairs, a rickety old piano. I tried that piano while he was out answering the telephone, and, really, a tin pan would have been sweet music in comparison. Everything

in the place was in keeping with the piano—which ought to be a vivid description.

He didn't look badly himself, only he had a hungry sort of face. Looked like he lived on shredded alfalfa, or cream of peanuts, or something. But he had a mighty fine head and jaw, had on a good suit of clothes, and made a hit with me from the start. Looked just like any ordinary young fellow.

I got right down to business, and told him what I wanted, which was a lesson every day for a week, after which I expected to leave town. He looked sort of startled when I sprung that on him.

"I never went up against that sort of proposition before," he said, with a smile. "But I guess I can accommodate you."

Next day I came over for my first lesson, and he played on my fiddle a little. Heavens! How that man played! I was thunderstruck. He played like an artist, a genius, a god, a fiend. I have heard plenty of violinists, all the big ones; but that man—Briggs was his name—had them all beaten to a blister and thrown off the bridge. Briggs! Think of that as a name for an artist!

I went through that first lesson in a sort of daze, but that wasn't a marker to the daze in which I went through some of the subsequent ones. He played for me every day—concertos, sonatas, concert-pieces of all styles and classes. He had the entire gamut of violin literature at his fingers' ends.

Daily I was growing more incredulous that a fiddler of his size had to fuss around a town like Pittsburgh, when he might be making concert tours like Kube-lik and Elman, and getting the money. I was a four-flusher as a musician, but I had a little bit of a business head on me.

II.

ONE day I said to him:

"I've been talking to your piano and your chairs in this room, and they tell me that you're not making a fortune teaching the violin. Things are not prosperous with you. Why, in Heaven's name, don't you get out and do something for yourself? If I had your technic, your tone, your interpretation, your genius, I'd make a streak across the sky you could see from Cohoes to St. Petersburg."

He looked at me with a sad, wistful smile, as though that were something he had thought about himself and put away from him as impossible.

"You see," he said helplessly, "I don't know anything about business."

He fumbled with his cuff, and I felt sorry for the poor devil.

"When I went to the university," he went on, after a pause, "I took an engineering course. But I'd been playing around for folks as a boy, and making a hit, and my brother told me I was a fool to take up anything like engineering when I might have a career before me if I went in for music. So I went in for music. It's been pretty hard."

His lip quivered, and I understood. It was pretty hard. I knew a little about that from my own experience.

"I thought I had had violin instruction before I went to Europe," he went on; "but when I got over there, I found I never had. I had paid my money for something I didn't get. So I had to work all the harder to make up for it. The very first lesson Thompson gave me was the Bruch concerto and twelve Kreutzer *Études*. I tell you I worked like a dog."

He looked around the room, and his eyes said, as plainly as you please: "And dern little recompense I'm getting for the nerve-racking, heart-torturing labor I've put in learning to play as I do."

But what he really said, a little sadly, was:

"People don't seem to care for what I play for them around here. I play a big concerto, some of the grandest and sublimest music that inspired man ever turned out, and they hardly give me a hand—even talk while I'm playing." His eyes flashed at the thought. "But there's an old Dutchman in town who plays stuff like Wieniawski's mazurkas and Sarasate's Spanish dances and De Bériot's *Scène de ballet*, and they go wild about him."

There was a little red spot in each cheek as he got up and slammed his fiddle down on top of the rickety piano.

A big thought had come to me, and, as I put my own fiddle in its case, my brain was buzzing with it.

"See here, Briggs," said I, "I'm a man of the world. You've got me faded

to a gasp when it comes to fiddling, but my business bump is bigger than your whole head. If I take you in hand, and promise to make a splendid financial success of you, will you do just what I tell you?"

He looked interested, I'll admit, but not just tickled to death. After he'd thought it over a minute, he said:

"Why, yes; I guess so."

I didn't half like his ice-box front, but I was too enthusiastic to let that stop me.

"The public wants to be humbugged," I went on, talking fast and earnestly. "Barnum was right—the public does want to be humbugged, especially by its musical celebrities. Here you are, a pupil of the great Thompson. You don't boost yourself, you wear your hair short, like any other man, you wear normal neckties, and, worst of all"—here my voice took on a note of positive scorn—"you are content with the name of Briggs. Even Kubelik," I snapped, "couldn't have succeeded with a name like Briggs!"

He looked at me with a languid half smile; but I could see that he was interested, all right.

"You're just like everybody else," I said. "That's why you're nobody. Be eccentric. Do crazy things. Get yourself written up in the papers. Great guns! If you'd only follow my instructions, you could put all the rest of them out of the business."

He didn't say anything for a few minutes. He took several long looks at the archaic piano and the stove on three legs. It seemed to me that he felt of his stomach, too; and then he said:

"Well, what do you propose?"

"I don't need to ask you if you've got any money," I said rather heartlessly. "And, Heaven knows, I haven't got much myself. But I'll stake you as a sure thing."

I talked to him earnestly for half an hour, went over my plan point by point, step by step, until he had it pretty thoroughly in mind.

It was a practical story—a miserable, four-flushing, humbugging plan from start to finish; but I knew it would work. I was a Hermann at humbuggery; for, when a man is none too good in his own

profession, he has to adopt means to make people think he is, if he's going to get on in the world.

III.

THE first step in my plan to make a success of Briggs was to give him time to grow out a big head of hair. As I said before, his hair was the color of Paderewski's—kind of a tawny, leonine hue, a mighty fine color for an artist. I had only thirty days' leave from my government job out West, so I had to mail in my resignation and get a job in a downtown theater orchestra, to give Briggs's hair time to grow.

Briggs had a nice, hustling, enterprising outfit of hair, though, and in the course of a few months he had a head of it that would have made Hambourg look like a billiard-ball—and you know how Hambourg wears it. Honestly, I was afraid I would have to buy Briggs a set of ribbons to keep his hair out of the soup.

When his hair had reached that stage, it was time to act, and I guess Briggs was glad of it. Around there, where everybody in his neighborhood knew him, it was pretty tough to have to make a long-haired spectacle of himself, and no mistake.

People used to look at him as though he were "bugs," and ask him if he were going to join a Wild West show. And bunches of little kids would line up as he went by and yell:

"Aw, come out o' de bushes! Come on out, kid; we see youse. Youse can't hide from us!"

That sort of thing don't go down very well with a man of shrinking, sensitive temperament like Briggs; and he stayed in the house as much as possible during those months, for which I don't blame him.

But now that the psychological moment had arrived, I bundled Briggs off to New York City one night, without saying a word to any one. From New York I snaked him over the big water to London. Then I got busy. I bought him a top-notch dress-suit—something he needed badly—and, besides, I got him a huge, roomy frock coat, and a bow necktie as large as a sash, for every-day wear. Then I did something that went against the

grain with Briggs and made him rebel not a little.

I changed his name!

Briggs got pretty hot about that; but it was part of my plan, and it had to go.

"The greatest musical artist in the world would be a nut with a name like Briggs," I told him. "It's got to be changed, or you back to the shivery piano and the three-legged stove."

So he wilted, and I changed his name to Brigowski.

I did a lot of hustling in the next few days.

I rented a prominent auditorium, got Brigowski's picture taken at a swell studio, had 'em rush out a print quicker than they'd ever moved before, jumped into a taxicab and tore over to a lithograph-house, where I left a rush order for a bunch of eight-sheet posters that would pull the money right out of their pockets.

I had the right hunch on it, too, for when I got the completed lithos they were the real dope. Three-quarter picture of Briggs in his dress-suit and his thousand dollars' worth of hair, holding his fiddle and looking dippy, and right across the bottom of it, in flaring scarlet autograph script, the name "Brigowski."

It was a triumph, and no mistake.

I got these things stuck up all over town, with dates under them. Everything was ready for the first concert which was to make the public sit up and squint, and was to be the "great London success" I expected to use as a come-on for a slashing big triumph in America and the Continent.

The night of the recital came.

I didn't have reserve enough in the treasury to spread things on very thick—couldn't have a symphony orchestra to play the concertos with Brigowski. So I had just hunted up an artist pianist who had almost as much hair as Brigowski—if he had had more, he would have grabbed all the honors from the star—and he and Brigowski had been practising together for a few days. They had everything down to perfection.

I was a little disappointed in the house. Nobody had ever heard of Brigowski before, but quite a number were there out of curiosity, as I had put a big bunch of fancy advance stuff in the newspapers

about his being a pupil of César Thompson, and the greatest living violinist.

Great Heavens! How those two hairy musikers played that night! The audience got up on its hind legs and shrieked. Bravos filled the air until you couldn't hear yourself think. The listeners weren't many, but they were loud. All through the concert the applause was deafening, and Brigowski played encore after encore, and nearly bowed himself into a fit. I tell you that was a great night!

After it was all over, women who had wept tubs of tears during the evening surged up on the platform and overwhelmed my virtuoso with profuse and lachrymose appreciation and adoration. He had them going worse than Paderewski ever dreamed of, and you know what that means. Even the men were dips over him, and that's way out of the ordinary.

Our lucky star seemed to be working overtime that night, for, just as it happened, Hatchetheimer, the great New York impresario, was in the house, and he was as bugs as the rest of them. In less time than it takes to tell it, he had signed Brigowski up for an extensive American tour under his management.

I felt pretty good about that. I had spent all but a few dollars of my lifetime's savings making a success of Briggs, and as the receipts of the evening were small, I was feeling a little shaky as to how I was going to see the thing through.

But Hatchetheimer saved the day, and I had it all framed up that after Brigowski got a good start and connected with the sky-scraping salary Hatchetheimer was to pay him, I would get all I put into him, and a lot more besides.

In fact, we had figured it out together that whenever it became possible I was to have my financial reward. To be honest, my business bump had been focusing on financial reward ever since I started out to boost Briggs.

IV.

As usual, about the time we think we've got a half-Nelson on prosperity, something happens to put both shoulders to the mat.

The exuberant, enthusiastic audience

had hardly left the hall before I got a cable from home, telling me to come at once if I expected to see father alive.

So, leaving Brigowski under the protecting wing of Hatchetheimer, I left on the first steamer for home.

I got there in time. Poor father! He knew me at once, but it wasn't long till he went off into a sort of stupor, and never came out of it.

That was an awful week for me. The horror of the Black Angel that devastated our home, and the consequent sadness, drove all thoughts of Brigowski and my brilliant scheme out of mind.

But necessity often gives us a nudge in the ribs that brings our thoughts back into their old channels.

I was almost broke. Father had left me nothing but a bunch of debts. I was out of a job. So I thought of Briggs—pardon me, Brigowski.

He was making a tremendous furor in the East. He had appeared in New York and Boston with the wildest success, and undoubtedly he was it.

Who had made him, who had given him the personality and the opportunity to display it, the chance to make good?

Little me, of course.

So I thought it was about time for me to shuffle up and get mine. I could use a little of that reward right then.

I found that Brigowski was billed for Philadelphia a few days hence, so it was me for Phillie. I found out what hotel he was stopping at, walked in, and looked at the register—and, sure enough, there, scrawled half-way across the page in broad, black script, was "Brigowski."

Oh, he was an apt pupil, all right!

That day I had heard of him going into a restaurant and throwing dishes at the waiter because he hadn't served his beans in the pot they were baked in. Fine! My heart swelled with pride.

When I heard of his tearing down the lithographs of a rival artist who was soon to appear, and trampling them under foot right in the lobby of his hotel before a crowd of people, I thought: "Briggs is the goods. When I see him, I'll congratulate him on the fancy line of bluff and hot air he is throwing at the public. He sure is as crazy as the most gigantic genius that ever teased tears and coin out of the dear people."

But, what do you think? When I sent my card up by a bell-hop, the boy brought word that he was indisposed and couldn't see me. Oh, what a bump! So I lay for him in the lobby.

When he came down, dressed for the concert, with a little nigger in livery lugging his fiddle-case, I butted up to him, stuck out my hand, and said:

"Hallo, Briggs, old man!"

He looked at me a minute, as though he had a faint recollection of having seen some one who resembled me back in the dim and misty past. Then he looked at me again, from head to foot—and passed me up!

Turned away without a word, climbed into his carriage, and left me standing there with my mit sticking out, looking like a sick hat-rack.

Was I sore? Ask me!

And I had put him into the business, connected him with the coin, blew in practically every red cent of the savings of a lifetime on the ungrateful dub!

Then, when I was down and out, and came back to get in on the receipts, as we had agreed on, he threw me down. My face got as red as a lobster, and I simply boiled inside.

"I'll get him," I told myself—"I'll get the dirty cad! I'll show him up—I'll flash my contract."

Then an awful thought hit me right between the eyes, and laid me out cold.

My contract! I didn't have any! In all the heat and hurry and hustle and bustle of changing Briggs into Brigowski, I had plumb forgot about the hard-headed business necessity for a contract in this day and age.

I had nothing to show that I had spent all my money and time making Brigowski what he was. If I should holler, I would get laughed at as a crank, and like enough I would go to jail.

So I swallowed the whole bitter pill like a man, and stepped out into the night feeling as though I'd been run over by a steam-roller.

There's no side-stepping it. That artistic temperament will get you, every time.

My business bump was all right, but there was one fatal flaw in my business bridge that dumped the whole thing into the depths below—I was a musician, too.

THE BLUSH OF VENUS.

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

A SHORT STORY.



FROM Bencoolen to Wake Rock, and from Point Danger to the Marquesas, you can gather a thousand stories concerning the biggest pearls found in the Pacific. The stories are all different, so are the pearls round which they are spun. That's just natural. Men who nuzzle after "blacklip" and "blue-edge" are not experts, and drink-shops from Padang to Port Kennedy add many grains to the gems by stirring the imaginations of the finders.

That's why many of the biggest haven't made a stir in Hatton Garden or Maiden Lane. Up around the Arafura you'll hear of the Peri of Papua, the Opal Moon, the White Ghost, the San Christoval, and nine hundred and ninety-six others; but I think there were only three men who knew of the Blush of Venus.

Once the tropics have held your heart a prisoner in a net of rose pink and lilac and wondrous purple, they call you wherever you stray. Those white beaches that look like lace petticoats fringing the green dresses of the islands, swing before your eyes in the night, and you just gasp. Then you hear the water gurgling over the sand that looks like diamond-dust, and you get a dream squint of a mother prahu with a mongrel clutch of sampans slithering across a trepang-scented ocean that's all ruby-colored and champagne-tinted, and when you wake in the morning everything looks like ten cents.

It was through a dream of that kind that I came to be one of the three who saw the Blush of Venus. Jack Desmond met me one morning after I had been dreaming of fluttering down the

Sulu Sea in a sky-blue schooner with turquoise sails, and three weeks afterward I was watching Desmond's crew scrape blacklip off the bottom of Torres Straits near Thursday Island.

Desmond was Irish-American, and he had thrown more gloves in the face of destiny than any man his age. He just lacked imagination; and when a strong man without imagination goes knocking round the fringe of the earth, where policemen are an unknown quantity and writs stop ten parallels away, he's not a good risk for a life-insurance company. But Desmond had luck.

We had a mixed crew—Javanese, Japs, Orang Laut, and Klings; but the best man on the lugger was a half-caste Chinaman from Dutch Borneo named Chola. He did the work of two on the boat, and when we dried out at Lul Rock he was worth three of the others.

It was Chola who found the Blush. When and where he found it, I don't know; but one morning Desmond sprang upon him, bounced him onto the boards, and rolled him over and over. The others just looked on wondering, and I grabbed a pump-stave to keep any one from interfering.

The half-caste tried to get a jiu-jitsu grip on Desmond, but his mind was so busy with the problem that he forgot to shift his head out of the way of a short-arm jolt. When he was recovering consciousness, Jack was in the cabin, showing me the Blush of Venus. I named it then and there.

II.

I've seen a few pearls, but the Blush wasn't the kind that a ten-grain speck could push out of your memory. It looked like a transparent film filled with

claret, and the color just came and went in it as if it were alive.

"How did you know he had it?" I gasped.

Desmond laughed.

"There were six signs," he said; "and when he sprang away from me when I touched his loin cloth, it made the seventh. Seven is a lucky number, so I grabbed him. Some fools tell you that the Chow and the Jap never show emotion. Huh! But isn't it a beauty?"

I nodded.

Desmond put the pearl in his mouth and sucked it; then he put it on a red silk handkerchief, and laid down near it on the bunk, half crying and half laughing over the find. He made me smile; but I was listening all the time to the noises up on deck, where some of the crew were reviving Chola with buckets of salt water.

"What'll you do with him?" I asked, referring to the half-caste.

Desmond thought I meant the pearl. The gem had all genders to him at that moment.

"Do with him?" he said, sucking the Blush softly. "Why, I'm going to give him to a girl living at Woollahra, near Sydney. I said I'd bring her back the biggest pearl ever scooped out of the Pacific, and, by Luk-e-ling, the sea-god of the Yaps, I've got it!"

"And Chola?" I asked, not bothering to tell him that it was the yellow-skinned gentleman I meant in the first instance.

Desmond looked up, brushed the hair out of his eyes, and laughed then as he remembered the little rumpus.

"Oh," he said, "the little yellow devil! Let him go on with his work of course."

Then he started to tell me about the girl to whom he had promised the pearl. He said she had auburn hair; but I had tested Desmond's eye for color when the sun would be slipping down toward Timor of an evening, so I formed my own opinion. He said she was plump, too, and I nearly smiled. Any person under two hundred pounds weight was in the first stages of consumption, in his opinion. Then he said her name was Birdie, and I had to go outside the cabin, because my face was aching to wrinkle itself up.

My imagination got to painting a plump Birdie with red hair, walking round with that big pearl on her breast; so I went up on deck, and after a time Desmond followed.

The half-caste was over the side when we came up the ladder; but when we got to the surface, there was nothing on his face to tell of the trouble. Desmond didn't look to see. His eyes were looking down toward Bass Straits, two thousand miles away. I'll bet he was wishing that he could set out and walk over that blood-tinted water so that Miss Birdie Williams would get the pearl in a hurry. He was a cool customer, was Desmond.

For two weeks everything ran on quietly. Desmond sat on the deck all day and dreamed of the Blush and the girl that was going to get it; but he could pull himself out of his dreams mighty sudden if any one tried to take him unawares.

Then, one afternoon, Chola took a fit after coming up out of the water; and when we were eating our supper, the Jap cook came along and reported him dead. Desmond just nodded his head and went on eating.

"That was sudden," I said, after the Jap had walked away.

"Very," said Desmond, and he smiled into his plate of curry. "Guess he died of grief over that pearl," he added as he finished eating. Then he stood up and walked into his cabin.

I went up on deck and smoked till near midnight, but when I went down the ladder Desmond was waiting for me. He was standing in the dark, near the door of his cabin, and when I came along he caught me by the arm and pulled me inside.

"Been waiting two hours for you," he snapped.

"What's wrong?" I asked, trying to breathe quietly and making as much row as a croupy hippo.

"Chola isn't dead," said Desmond; "he's shamming! Some trick is in the wind, and we've got to keep our lamps trimmed, or we'll go over the side without any canvas wrapping or prayer service."

"How d'ye know he's alive?" I asked.

"Seen him," growled Desmond.

"He's in the little cubby at the back of the cook's galley, and when I went in there the air was warm from his breath. I didn't touch him, because that would have sprung the plot, and I wanted to think."

He picked up his belt, took the pearl out of the cotton-wool in which it was packed, and laid it down on the table.

"Chola is coming after that," he said, "and I want to be prepared. See, the Queensland law will not permit the burial of a diver at sea, so I've got to take him to Port Kennedy. I don't see how Chola is going to gain anything by his faking; but a Chinaman is a shrewd guy. However, I'm going to slip into port to-morrow for reasons of my own, so that gives him to-night and to-morrow to get after the Blush."

"How many d'ye think are in the know?" I asked as Desmond hacked at the heel of his rubber boot.

"P'raps only the man that's feeding him; p'raps the whole bunch," he growled. "Look here! I'm putting this beauty into the heel of my boot, and if anything happens to me I want you to deliver it to Miss Birdie Williams, 711 Queen Street, Woollahra."

"Getting nervous?" I laughed.

Desmond looked at me, and I backed away. Somehow, Desmond's eyes would push you away when you tried to stare him down.

"I promised Miss Williams I'd get the pearl," he said. "It was my property before Chola stole it; and, now I've got it, I'm not going to let that yellow hound get it without a fight."

After he had fixed up the heel so that the cut couldn't be seen, he put out the light and got into his bunk, and I stumbled into mine. It looked like trouble, with Chola pretending; but I was that tired I fell asleep.

III.

I WOKE about three o'clock, feeling a bit surprised at finding myself still alive. I put out my foot hastily and kicked Desmond in the jaw, and that started trouble. He was crouched up, inside the door, waiting for Chola to come along, and he cursed me for five minutes for my clumsiness.

"Something'll happen to-day," he

growled. "Did you forget the name I gave you?"

"Miss Birdie Williams," I murmured.

"And the address?"

"711 King Street, Woollahra," said I.

"Queen Street, you blockhead!" yelled Desmond, and he made me chant that address a dozen times before breakfast. In the spells he told me about Miss Birdie's beauty, and I was tired when the coffee came along.

The early part of the day went by quietly, and late in the afternoon Desmond let on that he was swinging into port with the body of Chola. I guessed that the half-caste had really slipped his cable, but Desmond thought otherwise.

"I know when a man is dead," he snarled; "but whether Chola is dead or alive, he is not putting me out any."

Just as we got under way, a fat Malay tripped over a windlass and went overboard, and Desmond and I forgot all about Chola for one short moment. We rushed the bows, because the Malay appeared to be stunned, and Desmond yelled out an order to the steersman.

Just then there was another yell that you could hear over at Cape York, and when I turned my head I saw the defunct Chola step up from the fo'cas'le-ladder onto the deck. That was the only squint I got of him. The whole of that crew, having seen the apparition that produced the yell, were looking for the nearest track to the water: and, as we were in the way, Desmond and I got thumped with a black-and-yellow avalanche of arms and legs and bodies, and we went along with it.

When I came to the surface, the lugger was ripping down the straits, with Chola making faces at me from the wheel.

I cursed the Blush of Venus pretty heartily after I coughed up a gallon of warm salt water, and then I looked around. The black heads of the crew were bobbing near me, but there was no Desmond. I shouted and yelled, but nothing came of it. I began to think that Jack had got a whack on the head when going over, and had gone to the bottom. The crew seemed to think the same. Half a mile to leeward was a coal hulk with a Dutchman named Wagner aboard, and as night was slipping

down from New Guinea like a black cloud, we steered for her as fast as we could paddle.

I was all in when the Dutchman pulled me aboard his dingey. He told me afterward that I kept on saying "Miss Birdie Williams, 711 Queen Street, Woollahra," when he was yanking me up. He had made a note of the address with a bit of chalk, thinking it was a friend who was to be told of my death if I failed to come round; but he rubbed it out pretty quick when I told him it concerned Desmond. Dutchy had no love for Desmond.

There was one other missing beside Jack, and that was a boy from Surabaya; but one of the divers said that he had seen him aboard after the dead Chola had taken charge, so it looked as if he were in league with the half-caste.

The fat Malay had been helped by a Jap in the swim across, and Wagner's hulk looked crowded. But the Dutchman was very hospitable. When I told him that Desmond had gone to the bottom, he walked to the side and spat savagely into the night.

"Not heem," he gurgled. "He is de debil! He will turn up. Gone to de bottom? Yah! I not pelief heem dead till I see heem tipped over de side mit sixty pounds of chain tied to his toes."

But I reckoned it was all up with Jack. We burned lights, and I sat up all night thinking of the Blush of Venus in the heel of the rubber boot and the girl at Woollahra that wouldn't wear the gem after all. When the sun came up over a clear ocean, I staggered below and turned in.

It was the Dutchman who woke me up. He poked me viciously in the ribs, and when I got my breath I called him names in every dialect of the archipelago.

"Come up on deck," he growled. "Did I not tam well tell you so?"

I went up in a hurry when I saw the disgust on his face. When I got my head out of the hatch I saw the lugger coming toward us with Desmond at the wheel, and Chola and the boy reefing sails.

"He vos de debil," said Dutchy, when he got a chance between my cheers. "Some day he will die, but it will be from old age."

When I climbed aboard, Desmond explained things quietly.

"Chola didn't intend to stampede the mob," he said, laughing. "Well, that is what he says. He told me that he was in a trance, and he only found it out a few minutes before we got ourselves in such a good position for a bath. Me? Oh, I had luck. I caught the dingey-rope in falling over, and I kept my head under water till Chola had finished making faces at you and had wandered below to ransack my cabin. Then I climbed on deck, and put him into another little trance with the help of a boat-hook, so that he wouldn't forget the habit."

He handed the wheel to a Jap, and I followed him down to the cabin.

"Say," he growled, turning round on me. "What d'ye think that yellow devil was doing when I whacked him?"

I shook my head.

"He was overhauling the rubber boot that carried the pearl! That makes you stare, doesn't it? I took it off an hour before; but how did he know that I stuck it in there? What? I'm not frightened of Chola, but I am frightened of losing that pearl. I promised Miss Williams that I'd bring it to her, and she's going to get it."

He glared at me as if he was waiting for a contradiction, but I kept on nodding. It was good policy to nod when Desmond was laying down his own opinions.

"Look here!" he went on. "I'm not going to make a fuss about this business. The law moves slower than a sick turtle once you're north of Townsville, and I want to slip away. I'm going to turn the lugger over to Tom Hesketh when I get into port, and then I'm going to buck a steamer down to Sydney. The Blush is too valuable to keep in one's rags after this matter."

"I'm with you," I said.

The mile swim to the coal hulk had started my imagination into wondering what I'd have done if Chola had performed his resurrection stunt when no craft was within swimming distance.

IV.

THAT afternoon we pushed through the crowd of luggers and prahus into

Port Kennedy; and we didn't go round babbling of our intentions. We fixed everything up with Hesketh, and then, at the last minute, we crept aboard a sandalwood steamer bound for Brisbane. It was raining like the mischief when we were feeling our way out; but when we woke next morning, we had cleared the Albany Pass, and were slithering down the coast at a fourteen-knot gait.

Desmond sat up in his berth, gave the Blush a suck, and then held it up to a sunbeam that came through the port-hole. He wanted my opinion as to how Miss Birdie would wear it, and he had me pretty tired before the bugle blew for breakfast.

"Say! Won't she trim 'em when she slings it on her windpipe and sasshays round the Botanical Gardens and Lady Macquarie's Chair on Sunday afternoons?" he said. "Why, she could get into Government House on the strength of that pearl."

Then he started wondering as to how it would suit her auburn hair, and he kept it up all the day while we were slipping down by the Great Barrier.

Next morning we got a little surprise. Desmond had been wearing his rubber boots on the evening before, but when he got up in the morning the boots were gone. He cursed a heap.

"Why, Chola must be aboard!" he yelled. "The yellow devil thought I would leave the pearl always in the heel!"

The locks on those coasting steamers are the kind that open when the ship gives a good roll, but we were puzzled as to how he got on our track. Desmond went to the skipper after breakfast, and they started a hunt for stow-aways; but the boat had a crew hatched in the tropics, and they didn't look too close after one of their own breed.

The captain suggested the purser's safe if Desmond had any valuables, but Jack reckoned he'd hold the Blush till he presented it to Birdie; and he swore if he couldn't hold it, that Chola was welcome to it. I didn't mind the half-caste getting the pearl, but I didn't want a knife stuck into my ribs in a mistake; so I slept rather light till we reached Moreton Bay.

Desmond had planned for a few busy

hours in Brisbane. We hired a hansom and galloped out to Fortitude Valley at a breakneck pace; then we got out, dodged through side streets and back lanes, jumped cars, doubled on our tracks about seventeen times; then picked up another hansom and galloped back into town.

"We'll go aboard separately this time," said Desmond. "Don't go on till the last minute, and then watch the gang-way. There are two boats going at six o'clock—the Coonanbarra and the City of Melbourne. Take the first, and I'll see you on board."

The Blush had my nerves upset. I waited in the back parlor of a public-house opposite the wharf, and when the last bell went I rushed across and climbed up the plank as they were pulling it in. Desmond was hauled up over the side, and when he got his breath he reckoned we had given Chola the slip.

"He's a wise one if he's on our tracks now," he said, feeling his knee where he had skinned it climbing aboard. "The City of Melbourne pulled out from her wharf at the same moment as we left; besides, he had no idea we were going farther south."

I hoped that we had lost him, but I was a little anxious. Desmond took no chances. He slept little while we were going down the coast, and the more he kept awake the more I heard about Birdie. He wasn't engaged to her at all. He had just met her at a friend's house, and had promised to send her the biggest pearl he could find. That was Desmond's way.

"And I try to keep my word," he would say, sucking the Blush till its heart used to grow red as if it warmed beneath his breath. "This is surely the biggest pearl that has ever been located."

When we picked up South Head Light, on the third morning, I gave a sigh of relief. We would be at Circular Quay in four hours, I thought, and my nerves would have a rest.

Desmond was giving me Birdie at the rate of thirty knots an hour as we swung in through the Heads; and when a fellow pointed out a school of sharks, I walked over to the rail to dodge Jack's tongue.

"Nice customers," he said, as he fol-

lowed me over and stood looking at the fins cutting through the red water like so many plowshares. "I wouldn't like to play a game of hide-and-seek with that brigade."

The plowing squadron got on my nerves, and I turned to go below to pack my valise, when a figure passed me with a bound, stopped for a moment by Desmond's side, and then sprang over the side with Jack's leather belt gripped in a lean, yellow hand!

It was Chola! He had cut Desmond's belt with the point of a knife, and before we had recovered from our astonishment, he was breasting the waters of Port Jackson.

I didn't know where the Blush of Venus was secreted on the particular morning, but I formed a good idea the moment the half-caste hit the water. Desmond let out a yell of fury, and then, without stopping a moment to consider the danger, he sprang onto the rail and dived after the thief!

I don't want to see anything like that again. Of course, Chola hadn't seen that batch of gray nurses that were swimming near us, but Desmond had. I said he had no imagination. Some one signaled the bridge, and we lowered a boat in record time, while a storm of life-buoys were thrown into the water. But those two were not looking for life-buoys. Chola was making for Middle Head, about half a mile away, where he had a good chance of getting into the bush, and Desmond was after him full speed.

V.

It made my blood run cold to see those four fins plowing round directly in the track that Chola was taking. We screamed and yelled out warnings, but I knew Desmond. He wouldn't turn for a thousand sharks. And that four kept circling round and round as if they were sentinels waiting for the half-caste to come into the territory they were guarding!

Chola put on a spurt, and then he eased down; and, raising himself for a moment out of the water, he looked to see how far he was from the shore. Then he saw the patrol! He gave a scream, and, swinging round, started to

swim back toward Desmond, while the fellows in the boat drove it toward the two.

But Desmond kept straight ahead. He had started out after Chola, and there was nothing swimming in that harbor that would turn him back. The two came closer together, and then we saw the black fins disappear as Desmond stretched out his arm and gripped the terrified half-caste.

I don't want another sight of that little whirl of hell-foam that came round the two of them at that moment. I saw that once before, when a bull-nose grabbed a kanaka at Wollongong break-water.

Chola threw up his arms and sank, while Desmond turned and swam to the boat that was now only a few yards away. No wonder Dutchy Wagner said he had the devil's luck.

Desmond was clutching the belt when we hauled him on deck. After he got his breath, he turned to me and laughed.

"I beat him, after all," he said; then he put his fingers in the pouch where the pearl was packed in cotton-wool.

He fumbled for a moment, then he looked round helplessly and rolled over on the deck in a swoon. The pouch was empty! Chola had taken out the pearl while swimming, and now the Blush of Venus is lying somewhere inside Sydney Heads, under the big guns of the fort.

I didn't see Desmond for a week after we reached Sydney; then I met him.

"That little mishap was not so bad as it looked, after all," he said. "Miss Williams married a Riverina wool king while I was up north, and now she is on her way to London, where she can buy all the gems she wants. He's a millionaire."

I thought it cool of Desmond. "What are you going to do now?" I asked.

"I'm going up to this new gold-field at Wyalong," he said.

He went, too; and four weeks afterward I read that Mr. Jack Desmond had struck a marvelously rich reef, and was then negotiating with a company that offered him one hundred thousand pounds for the claim. The Dutchman was right about his luck.

BRAZENHEAD IN MILAN.*

BY MAURICE HEWLETT,

Author of "The Forest Lovers," "Richard Yea and Nay," "New Canterbury Tales,"
"The Fool Errant," "Half-Way House," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD, soldier of fortune, of a swift sword and many scars, appears at Pavia in 1402, crimson and shining in the face, his hair cropped in the Burgundian mode, and mustachios climbing to his ears. In a tavern he kills Lisciasangue, third murderer to the Duke Galeazzo, of Milan. Brazenhead takes his sword and sets out for Milan to secure the post formerly occupied by Lisciasangue.

Near the city he meets Liperata, nursing her baby as she rides sideways upon an ass. He attempts to pass through the gates with her, but the sentinels, noting his two swords and warlike air, call out the guard. Liperata goes on her way, and a passport is demanded of Brazenhead. He presents a parchment, inscribed with Latin, of which the soldiers can make nothing. Brazenhead tells them it's from the King of England to the Duke of Milan, upon which they conduct him to the castle, where Dominican monks essay to understand the parchment's message. They read it as being a kind of legal writ, having nothing to do with any one outside England. Brazenhead adjures the monks that it reads so because it is a secret code communication.

Brazenhead is conducted to the duke's presence, where he amazes that personage by a long tirade well larded with flattery for Galeazzo. Then he tells him he has slain Lisciasangue and desires to serve in his place. The duke appoints him third murderer.

He meets his colleagues, Canus and Gelsonino, who instruct him in his duties. His first task is to kill a wretch convicted of deer-stealing, now lying in bonds in a tunnel. Brazenhead cuts the bonds and makes the prisoner fight. The fellow puts up such a sly and sturdy sword that Brazenhead is fain to set him free, especially when he learns that he is a former comrade in service of the Duke of Burgundy.

Brazenhead reports the deer-stealer slain and awaits his next commission.

CHAPTER VI.

DESPERATE DOINGS WITH A BISCAYAN.



WHEN he was told off for the duty of strangling three ruffians who lay chained in the well of Santa Chiara. Captain Brazenhead hesitated, but only for a moment. It appears that, for once, he doubted of his prowess.

"'Tis true, I once hanged a running dog, when I was a lad," he allowed; "but since then the sword hath been my arm; and sometimes the long-bow—sometimes the long-bow. Yet tell me over their names and conditions, that I may consider them."

The three prisoners, they told him, were Lo Spagna, Squarcialupo, and a nameless young man, an Egyptian. Lo Spagna was a one-armed man of sur-

passing strength and infamous conversation, consorting with Hussites and Waldensians, suspected of a plot to take off the duke in the sacrament.

Squarcialupo was old in sin. He had been in the galley at Lerici, and having torn up a bench with his teeth, had used it as a club, and freed himself. Retaken at Bergamo, he had been offered his freedom upon condition that he would eat one of his fellows on the chain, and had shortly refused.

"A very contumacious villain," was Captain Brazenhead's comment; "but too good for the cord. Well, and who is your third?"

Nothing was known about the Egyptian, save that he had a ragged ear, and was branded on the shoulder with a galloping horse.

"Why," says the captain, "and how else would you brand an Egyptian? But

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continue." This Egyptian, they said, was in the well, on the information of the Augustinian order, for atheism. At this the captain's eyes showed a dangerous light. "What! He denies God! If he does so he strangles; but I'll never believe it of any but the Jews."

There seemed no room for doubt, however. The proof was that when he was put before an image of the holy Virgin, he addressed it in an unknown tongue, which was exactly what a man would do when he intended to deny her divine attributes.

The captain shook his head. "It looks black against him, and so it does. I take a whipcord in my poke for this renegade. He shall say the *Ave* backward before he chokes."

One whipcord, then, three sacks, and three swords besides his own, formed his equipment for the execution of the law's decree.

"There may be nothing in it, after all," he considered; "and I'll not spoil sport until I am obliged." It will be seen that he again intended to temper justice with hard knocks.

To the Pozzo Santa Chiara he strode in his awful array, and was lowered into it by a bucket on a windlass. Now the well was literally that, thirty feet deep and fifteen across. In the midst was a brick pier, to the which the three condemned ruffians were fettered, two by the leg and one by the neck. The rains might rot and the sun shrivel them; for all was open to the sky.

The dreadful apparition of a man, whiskered, gigantic, masked, clothed in blood-red, with four swords under his arm, three sacks over his shoulder, and the end of a whipcord hanging from his trunk, produced its unfailing effect. The chained wretches backed the length of their tether, and, squatting on their hams, blinked and gibbered at their doom. The Egyptian, clasping his brown knees in his hands, buried his face between them and appeared to be praying to the devil.

Nothing in the executioner's first words extenuated their despair.

"Friends of Misery," he said, "you bond-servants of concupiscence, an offended God, and the law's sacred nature

alike demand your righteous extermination. They demand it of me, Testadirame, and it is not likely that I shall fail them. Prepare then to account for the uttermost farthing of your debts, and see me notch the tallies, by cock."

The Egyptian did not move, nor cease his prayers; Squarcialupo sniffed through one nostril, while he held the other firmly against his knee.

"Stand up, Lo Spagna!" the captain roared, "stand up, you left-handed devil, and meet Testadirame, drinker of blood."

The little black-bearded, snub-nosed man, bent nearly double amidships, shuffled to his feet and saluted the dreadful swordsman. He, erect and discerning, assorted him at once.

"There is this to be said of thee, Lo Spagna, that if thou hast lost an arm, thou canst spare it better than most. That which thou hast is too long by cubits. What, Barbary, canst thou scratch a flea? Canst thou pitch a coconut? Ha, tree-topster, show thy tail, then."

At this shocking mirth Lo Spagna mouthed uneasily, and uneasily rubbed his knee. Captain Brazenhead shook his sword at him. "Say the *Credo*, thou toe-fingered mock man, say the *Credo*, or I lop thee into fire-wood lengths, for the circumcised doubter I believe thee." By a pardonable confusion he had supposed him the atheist of the party, and was agreeably surprised. "*Credo in unum deum omnipotentem*," the fellow quavered forth, and finished without a throwback. By force of habit his yoke-mates quired *Amen*.

So far the wretch had cleared himself.

"This is indifferent well," admitted his executioner, and bent frowning brows upon Lo Spagna, considering how he should most surely convict him of sin. "Now listen to me," said he, sure of his man. "Thou hast crossed the Bidassoa."

Accusation of an unheard-of crime caused the little man to dance up and down, like a bear asking for supper. He protested vehemently.

"Never, my lord, by all my hopes! I would not do it—I should shame to do it—oh, that I should live to be accused of such a deed! I am an old Christian,

my lord, a very old Christian, and the only cross I know is that of salvation." He began to chant, "*O Crux! O Crux, spes unica! O lignum vite, stirps Davidis! O sæcula sæculorum!*" And looking keenly up: "You see that I have my clergy."

But the captain spurned him. "I see that thou art a very vile Biscayan, clergyman or none. Yet for the sake of a little person, known to me in Bilboa, when I was there in eighty-nine, thou shalt fight with me for thy deplorable life. I had believed thee an atheist, upon my soul, and had a cord for thy wry neck. 'Tis better for thee to be a one-armed ape of Spain than so outrageous a fellow. Hold thee still now, while I loose thy fetter."

The little man was loosed, and slowly, pleasantly, straightened himself.

"By stretching," said the captain, "thou mightest reach my nipple yet. Horrid food for thee there, Biscayan. Take now what blade thou wilt. This of Ferrara is the longest; have thou that? Stay a little. Tie me up my right arm with this cord, wherewith I shall shortly strangle the atheist, when I have found him. Tie me close, dog. Dost thou think that I would crow over a Biscayan the less?"

Deftly Lo Spagna bound him up, and they began their bout. The other pair, squatting by the pillar, watched and wondered, and hoped greatly.

The Biscayan, if such he was, proved himself a marvel of his age and nation. Such agility, lightning advance and retreat, thrust and parry had scarcely been seen since Bernard del Carpio engaged the dwarf Malinart. He would run in, drive and duck; then turn and fly like the wind. Such were his tactics.

Twice Captain Brazenhead, thinking to have him, chased him round the limits of the well. But Lo Spagna ran so fast that he caught his enemy up. Pursuer became pursued; the unchivalrous might have said it was the greater man who ran, the justiciar who fled from justice; but we know that it could not be so. Pursuing who might, they ran like greyhounds, then to it again, one, two, one, two, until for a third time the Biscayan, stooping, ran in and delivered his point.

Turning immediately, he ran, his fate after him. Captain Brazenhead chased Lo Spagna, Lo Spagna sped faster and chased Captain Brazenhead; then, suddenly, as they slipped round like beetles in a cask, the Egyptian edged out a foot and brought the captain down. Was this treason? I fear it. Lo Spagna buffeted into him, and flew over his head, his length on the floor. Immediately Captain Brazenhead arose, set his foot on the other's chest, and nicked the point of his sword into his throat.

"I dig—thou diest—is a good verb, and an active verb. Phew! Bilboan, thou art a monarch of the chase. Say thy prayers now, say thy prayers, for I must kill a man this day—and why not thee? But that none shall say that I deal unfairly by a fine little rogue, have at thee left-handed. Now beware!"

The Biscayan writhed under the sword's point. "One word, one word, noble enemy," he faintly urged.

"Say on, dead man." It had been fine to have watched the Egyptian just then—the Sphinx-face, he had.

"That little person of my people, known to your excellency—had she a red poll?" Thus far the Biscayan. The captain's eyes grew dreamy.

"It was something reddish. There was a tang. I know that I called her Judas when I was merry, and Foxy when she crossed me."

"And her eyes, noble sir! Her fair eyes?"

"They were not what you would call a pair," said the captain. "But one was well enough, inclining to the yellow. With that she could make pretty work, I assure you."

"And so she could," the Bilboan said, "and I should know it, for she was my aunt."

Starting, Captain Brazenhead somewhat recoiled, and in so doing plucked his sword out of Lo Spagna's neck with the kind of noise you make when you draw a cork. A spasm of pain contracted the prisoner's features; but in his eyes hope shone bright.

As for Captain Brazenhead, he knew that he must once more have mercy. "Cock's body, and is the world so paltry small?" The sword's point drooped nerveless to the ground. "I spare thee,

Bilboan, for thy aunt's merry sake. Thou mayst bless her name in thy prayers."

"She was a fine woman," said the little man, sitting up and closing the wound in his neck. "May she go with God."

"She was a knowing one," replied Brazenhead. "There was little I could teach her—not worth speaking about." He turned to his business. "Into the sack with thee, Barbary, and lie quiet until I have done with those hampered rogues." Here the Egyptian wetted his lips.

"Sir," said the Biscayan, "I will help you there, if I may, for my aunt's sake."

"By cock, and you shall!" the hero cried. "A main! A main! Three arms to four! Stand up, you drolls."

He turned short upon the chained men, who were already on their feet, a murderous couple; the one a square-headed, heavy man of past middle life, with hanging chops, and not a hair upon him; the other, the Egyptian, hatchet-faced, lithe, and walnut brown, with restless eyes which would never meet yours, and tight lips never soothed by smiling.

The bigger was enormously strong. His muscles rippled as he moved, like incoming waves. The younger was all wire and brain; no ruth was in either, nor law, nor quarter. Captain Brazenhead sized them up and down, when he had set them free.

"Now, my braves," he said, "we shall have sport. You know my way, and if ever I saw rufflers, ambushmen behind a hedge, or outlaws in a clump of scrub, then do I know your way also." He flung two swords with a generous gesture at their feet, then balanced his own. "Take your fancy, little men, and get to work. There's light enough for the game we play, and a rare game it shall be."

The Bilboan lined up with him; and he set on with a shout.

CHAPTER VII.

DOUBLE BATTLE.

IT was rare, very rare, a game for the heroes in the trenches about Ilium, when Diomedes fought waist-deep in dead men, and yellow-haired Menelaus

ranged disconsolate the walls, crying upon the false thief Paris to show himself. From the hush of preparation to Captain Brazenhead's cry of onset was but a moment of long breath; and then immediately the ring was alive with whirling blades, and steel clanged on steel like church-bells of an Easter morning.

Brazenhead raged like a plunging horse. He seemed everywhere at once—wallowing in his work, snorting, shaking his head. Like a strong swimmer newly in the water, rejoicing to feel the tide, so did he breast the waves of battle.

Ever on the lookout for advantage, the Egyptian writhed in and out, or darted like an eel, now this side, now that; and the Bilboan, bending at the knees, ran in where he could and cut left-handed at the heavy Italian. That livid giant was sore beset, and by his breathing betrayed himself. So long as he kept his wind he did well—as when he laid open Captain Brazenhead's forearm with a smashing blow, and cut down the Bilboan as if he had been a hemlock.

But, alas for him! Even as he roared his triumph Brazenhead set upon him, and mowing at the tendons of his knees, missed his aim indeed, but split open one of his calves horizontally, and laid him his length. When one of that party—the Egyptian, I believe—cried a halt, Squarcialupo could not rise above one knee, and then his wounded calf could be seen, notched like a leg of mutton.

All the champions were hurt; the Egyptian had lost his ragged ear, and might have been shaking the blood out of his head before the fighting stopped. Two fingers the less was the brave Biscayan. Captain Brazenhead might well swing his forearm; but Squarcialupo was down and could fight no more. The conqueror—all duty to his prince cast to the wind—felt magnanimous, little disposed to insist upon his right.

"Bleed on your sacks, bleed on your sacks, you rogues!" he cried upon his victims, "or how shall I carry you through Milan for dead?"

Grinning at his ruse, they obeyed him. The captain sat upon the ground, and surveyed them.

"Squarcialupo, my old son," he said, "let us take up your business. You

broke from your oar, they tell me, and I'll not blame you for it. I would have done the same. But what kind of a fool am I to think you, to be lagged again?"

"Captain," said the Italian hoarsely, looking with intense interest at the fountain in his leg, "it was done by craft. I am something of a drinker, you must know. Now, as I lay in the sun, sleeping off my draft, the duke's archers came upon me and knew me again; and I awoke to find myself in this hole."

"Knew thee again, sayst thou?" Brazenhead picked him up. "Explain me that saying, I'll trouble thee."

"I am a Pisan, noble captain," said Squarcialupo, "and followed the fleet, making war upon the Genoese; and when I was rifling a corpse—as it might be you or me—it turned out to be no corpse at all, but a quicker man than I was. So they chained me to a bench in the galleys, and there I sweated for six years less one. Therefore, sir—"

"Therefore! Therefore! No therefore at all, thou paltry fellow," the captain roared, sternly frowning. "What have thy beastly habits to do with my question? 'Twas Genoa chained thee to a bench—and Genoa was wise. But if they knew thee again in Milan, they had known thee of old."

"Why, yes, sir," the heavy Italian replied; "long ago, when I took the old Duke Barnaby's pay for the war in Piedmont—"

"Bleed on your sack!" the captain interrupted him. "Bleed on your sack! See what a quag you make out here."

"—and valiantly I should have served him but for an evil acquaintance I made. For in his service there was a spearman, a most rascally knave, if not the devil in person, who seduced me with hopes of high renown combined with comfort. Sir, he was the plausiblest. God-bless-you kind of a man that ever you saw—and you will have seen many—"

Captain Brazenhead's face was a study at this time. Profound meditation, humor, judgment, acquaintance with villainy, benevolence; all knowledge could be read there. He covered his mouth with his hand, his hand with his nose, and his eyes twinkled as if to say, "Proceed, son."

"—and says this sly one to me over the

camp-fire, 'Hark ye, jailbird!'—for he had a pleasant name for everybody—'know'st thou aught of a convoy that comes this way?' 'A convoy?' says I. 'What convoy?' Just like that I said it, civil-spoken; and says he: 'Treasure, hire for the troops'; and lays his finger along his nose, as you might do."

It so happened that Captain Brazenhead was doing exactly that, and no less. The coincidence startled him; he dropped his hand, and began to hum an air.

The Italian resumed: "'And what of what?' says myself. 'We have our share, I suppose?' Says he darkly: 'Look to it that we do.' To be brief with you, sir, he did beguile me into a dark venture—me and a company of eight Christians—that with horses and arms we went up the sea-road some six leagues by night, and there lay hid in a little wood, and stood by our arms all night, and heard him tell tales—this wily, hairy man. And in the gray of dawn came the convoy down the sea-road, a round dozen of men-at-arms, with the treasure on mules' backs; and at the word of command, 'Leap, ye thousand devils!' out we did leap, and put those men to the sword; and the muleteers fled, believing that hairy man's word that we were a thousand—though we were but eight Christians and one devil."

Captain Brazenhead cheered the speaker: "Oh, brave! It was bravely done, my brother!"

"Not so brave as you might suppose," said the Italian, with grief thickening his voice. "When we came to share the plunder, what think you fell to me out of all that booty untold? Three sols Tournois, as I'm a hoping soul—and if I had remained snug in camp I had had fifty. But, said that deceiver, I was the best nourished man he had ever set eyes on, and therefore—"

"Therefore" will be thy ruin, Demetrio," said Captain Brazenhead. "I gave you four, which is enough for any man not a leader of a company. But now, look you, I spare your life for the sake of our old friendship. You shall go alive into that sack, and drink my health this night in a flagon or two of

right liquor—you, man, who, but for my clemency, might have been paddling upon red-hot bricks, mingling fires for your new prince, Beelzebub. Think of it, Demetrio, and rejoice greatly—and there's for you and your three sols Tournois. For I'll go into the fire myself for it that I gave you the four."

Sedately, with a very stiff leg, the large Italian crawled into his sack, and lay hidden there beside the Biscayan, who was by this time asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD, AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGMENT, SPARED THE EGYPTIAN.

THE Egyptian, who had been lying his length upon the sack, destined, as he hoped, to receive him alive, and who had lost nothing of the conversations between his fellow-prisoners and their great opponent, now arose to his feet and came wheedling to Captain Brazenhead.

"You shall spare me also, noble captain, if you please, to be a credit to you yet."

"That," said Captain Brazenhead, "you never will be."

The Egyptian sighed. "Who knows?" he inquired. "Sir, if you will but listen to my tale—"

The captain frowned upon him. "Fair and softly with your tale," he said. "Why should I listen to thee, rascal, since thou must die?"

"Die, captain! Oh, captain!" The Egyptian shivered.

"Aye," said Brazenhead, "die is the word." He was irritated with the man. "Cock's wounds!" he cried out, "am I executioner to the Duke of Milan, and execute no man? Is it to be said of me: 'Testadrame is an unprofitable servant?' Never in life! Dog, thou diest!"

The Egyptian shook like a straw in the wind. "But, sir, having spared the life of a Spanish renegado—" he began to plead.

"Pooh!" says the captain. "Luck helped him. I played with his aunt."

"Alas!" said the Egyptian. "alas! that I am an orphan! I would have

made you free of my entire family, could I have supposed that it would ever come to this. But, so it is that when I left Lutterworth in fair, green England—"

Here he paused and scanned the stern man's face to see if Lutterworth were to help him. It was not; he had touched no chord. Captain Brazenhead's features were marble.

"Proceed, Egyptian," he said: "I listen. When thou leftest Lutterworth—"

"When I left Lutterworth, and went to seek my fortune in London, I lived happily enough with a brave company gathered in Houndsditch, in the fields there and about the Old Cat tavern—does your honor not remember Catherine—Kate Tossell—long-legged Kate?"

Captain Brazenhead spoke as one in a dream. "I do not," he said. "Get on."

The Egyptian, most uneasy, shifted his ground. "Alack the day, noble captain, in the which I left that proud city and went down with a horse to sell—to Bristol—" Captain Brazenhead started, snorted, and pounced upon him.

"That horse thou stolest, vile thief! He is branded on thy shoulder; thou art a dead man. A flea-bitten white gelding—that screwed the off-hind foot—"

"Oh, sir; oh, sir!" cried the Egyptian, falling on his knees. "That horse was never yours!" His case was parlous; you may touch the chords too often, it seems. But, no!

"By cock, and it was not," said the captain, "but I knew the horse. The man that owned it—or called himself the owner—"

"Aye, sir," said the young man, with gleaming eyes—"aye sir, right, sir—so he called himself; but he lied, sir."

"I'll warrant that he did," said Brazenhead: "for he was not called Glossy Tom for nothing. Well, then—" Hesitation marked for the first time his incisive lineaments and dissipated the lightning of his eyes. The Egyptian considered his case settled. "Since I prove to be of the number of your friends, dear sir," he ventured—but too hastily. The captain recoiled.

"A friend, thou!" He towered over the man. "I fancied the horse, 'tis true, and thou wast beforehand with me.

Pooh! I had but to stretch out mine hand. And now I remember that thou art a horrible knave. Didst thou not address Our Lady in an unknown tongue full of blasphemy? Horse or no horse, I tell thee that thou diest."

Trembling, looking all ways for help, muttering with his pale lips, the wretched Egyptian faltered.

"It was the tongue I know best, noble captain. I am a very pious Christian; better than some who have their Latin. I spoke in the Roman to her Ladyship—and she heard me. I prove that, sir; I prove that!" His eyes gleamed; you could see the whites of them. "The proof that she heard me," he said, "is that you are here, her lieutenant in this wicked place—yourself an Englishman—"

"By the mass," replied the captain, "all this may be very true, and yet be woundily inconvenient."

He held his chin, and this time the young man believed himself snatched out of the pit. He came forward obsequiously, bending at the knees. Captain Brazenhead roared at him to hold off.

"I forswear my nation!" he cried. "I become Lombard! I will embrace Jewry before I let thee go!"

But it was too late. The Egyptian now held him by the knee.

"Captain," prayed he, "noble captain, you will never break a man who got the better of you in a horse deal."

"Who says that I will not?" And yet he was touched. If he could spare Squarcialupo, of whom he had made a fool, how not this oily rogue who had made a fool of him? And it was not to be denied the fellow had fought for his skin. Captain Brazenhead had it not in him to take life in the cool of his bile. He was so made that he, who would cut a man's liver out of him in fair fighting, came afterward to love his enemy if he had so much as scratched him. He knew this was a weakness.

"Look you," he was wont to say to his opponent, "if you would save yourself from me, wound me where you can. I consider you carrion at this speaking; but he who draws my blood wears armor of proof for me. Now, then, have at you, soldier!"

Meditating his own nature and deploring it, muttering to himself: "Mayhap I do wrong—I do grudge this fellow his mercy—upon my soul I do grudge it him," Captain Brazenhead remained intensely in thought for many minutes, his head sunk upon his breast, his arms folded. At last, as if suddenly awaking out of sleep, he threw his chin up and stamped with his foot.

"Into your sack, you black-livered hound! May hell forgive me the wrong I do him this day, and count it not against me when mine cometh!" It was a sight to see how the Egyptian slipped in—like a terrier into kennel when the whip is whistling.

There, then, for good or evil, in their sanguine wrappings, lay the three ransomed men; there, over them, like a meditative God, stood Captain Brazenhead, with a hand to grasp his chin, and one finger of it to rake in his mustaches.

He set a foot upon the round of a sack; deeply, profoundly he thought upon mercy, justice, judgment, the weighing of souls and suchlike themes; and here, if you will have it, is a summary of his reflection.

"Now have I here ensacked four indifferent rascals bound straightly to my person by cords of steel. They worship me as the author of their being, as, in a sense, I am. No doubt, they would follow me all over the world; a body-guard the like of which the Duke of Milan might pray for night and day—and with him all long Italy." His eyes flashed fire. "Long Italy! Long Italy! By their means I make good the soothsay that I heard in the tavern of Pavia when, with my foot upon Lisciasangue's remains, I vaunted, *There lies long Italy*."

"It was true, by cock, for all that, when I spake, I spake as in a glass darkly. Aye, darkly; but it was true. For see me now! To each of my four scoundrels there will adhere—like ticks to a sheep's back—lesser scoundrels, to each one ten at least. That gives me four-and-forty desperate men; and with forty men you may take a gate-house—and hold it, by cock's body! Nay, you may get by shock a town, as my Lord John Swynford got Coulanges in Brittany on a foggy night of Martinmas, and became

viscount thereof, and sweated meat out of the burgesses, and honey out of their wives, and levied toll upon all and sundry faring that way into France, and took to wife Melisette, daughter of Simon de Forz, and got a son, who is Viscount of Coulanges to this day. Viscount of Coulanges—Viscount of Pavia! Put it so that I catch Pavia unawares and become its viscount—what then? A royal beginning: we begin with Pavia.

"Every male of Pavia, of proper age and fully membered, following my banner, we lay siege to Milan. The sooner the better; for that old dog-fox Sforza is warring in Umbria, and I could not cope with Sforza until I have all my Pavians matched and in full bearing—say, for twelve years at the least. Nay, Brazenhead, nay. Testadrame, my ancient, strike thy metal while 'tis hot.

"Milan falls—Milan falls! And there's the thigh of Italy under my thigh!

"Now Rome, the city old, lies about the knee of Italy—is, as you may say, the knee-cap; and Venice is the hamstring. Let me work it out, let me work it out. You cut the hamstring, and the knee gives, and the leg drops. Venice gives me Rome; Naples is the toe. Cut

the hamstring, the knee is nerveless; then gangrene assails the toe, and it fritters and falls off. But with Milan to add to Pavia, who is to keep me from Venice? Pooh! I lead a host. To-morrow, therefore, to the shock of Pavia!"

He swept the mist of glory from his eyes; he lifted his head and bellowed for his men—those dread apparitors who hover in Milan, who sit about the jails, like vultures patient on their trees about a battle-field, awaiting the summons to their obscene task.

One by one the crimson heaps were lifted out of the Well of Santa Chiara; lastly Captain Brazenhead himself set his foot into the grappling-hook and swung aloft. The tumbril-cart was loaded with its sodden load; the executioner sat down upon the pile and ordered the disposal of his dead.


In a disused hermitage, in the burial-ground of Sant' Eustorgio, he chose to hide his three recruits, and to add to them Tranche-coupe, the stout Burgundian. Means were found to victual the garrison, which, sworn to secrecy and commended to the gods of war and good luck, their leader then left—going, as his duty was, to make his report to the duke.

(To be concluded.)

LOVE AND REFORM.

BY LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

A SHORT STORY.

 THROUGH the window of the drawing-room in which Agatha sat facing her mother she could see the tall columns that supported the portico of the Kinnaird house. They had supported it for a good deal longer than a century; a soldier had passed from under them to join the ragged troops of Francis Marion, another to ride in Wade Hampton's cavalry. The latter had never come back.

Agatha looked up at Fraser's painting of that soldier-uncle of hers, young, bright, alert, and now gone so long into the darkness.

With all the memorials of her race about her and the whitening head of her mother at the opposite window, even the courage of her youth began to fail. But the great announcement had to be made. This was no time for hesitation or delay. She folded her hands firmly in her lap.

"Mother, I've promised to marry Robert McGrath."

The fine head at the other window was scarcely raised.

"That's an ill-timed jest, isn't it, Agatha?"

The girl laughed in spite of her nervousness and pain.

"But it's not a jest, mother; it's quite serious and true."

A look of patient unbelief showed on Mrs. Kinnaird's face.

"Oh, Agatha, I have real worries just now!"

The girl sprang up.

"What have you to say against him, mother?"

"Against whom?"

"Bob—I mean, Mr. McGrath."

"You ask me that, Agatha?" Mrs. Kinnaird looked up now. "You are the first girl of the family who would have asked that. It's not only the man's origin—though we know what that is. You know the rest."

"The rest?"

"You know that Mr. McGrath is the leader of a set of violent persons who, under pretense of reforming the city government, have slandered our best families, our oldest friends. Your own father has not escaped."

The girl bit her lips.

"I beg your pardon, mother, but he has escaped. No one would dare to say anything against father."

"I don't understand such distinctions," Mrs. Kinnaird arose now. "Your father's administration has been attacked, and his friends have been held up to scorn. Your disloyalty is mad—mad!"

Agatha stepped nearer to her mother.

"Bob believes that he is doing right. I don't say that he is. I love him. Would you, in my place, have abandoned your happiness for the sake of a political squabble?"

"A political squabble? My child, your ancestors helped to found this republic. Who is this Mr. McGrath that he should judge us? I don't understand you. My happiness could never have depended on such things."

She turned to go, but Agatha stopped her.

"I shall tell father to-night."

Mrs. Kinnaird shrugged her shoulders.

"Your father has been worried lately.

You have seen that, I hope. If you think that you ought to add to his perplexities, I have nothing to say."

Mrs. Kinnaird went out, and Agatha hurried to her own room. The tears were very nearly on her lids. In the happy ardor and confidence of youth she had counted on sweeping away all obstacles; she had not anticipated the bitterness and difficulty of a real struggle. That her father had been for many years an alderman; that for the past four years he had been mayor of the city—these things seemed to her very much in the order of nature.

When she had fallen in love with the leader of those "violent persons," as her mother said, she had indeed felt a shock. But the look of Robert's good gray eyes, the temperateness of his speech, the exquisite reasonableness that vibrated in his rich voice, had robbed her of all fear and misgiving.

He might be in the wrong. He had always at least mentioned her father with a finished courtesy. It was the man she loved; it was the man in whom she believed. The merely local issues were here to-day and gone to-morrow. They were, she thought, external to her true life. The man, her heart affirmed, remained.

She dressed herself carefully and went down-stairs. In the dining-room her father and mother were already seated at the polished mahogany table. Their demeanor was grave, and Agatha looked hesitatingly from one to the other. Her father's face was flushed; his eyes looked tired; his hands trembled; and she could see the anxiety in her mother's eyes. For some time they were all silent. Then Mrs. Kinnaird spoke:

"The convention meets next week, doesn't it, Henry?"

He answered without raising his eyes from his plate.

"Yes; next week."

"And you will be renominated?"

"I suppose so." His voice was dull and unhappy.

Mrs. Kinnaird leaned toward him across the table.

"You will accept, of course?"

"Of course."

Mrs. Kinnaird breathed a sigh of relief, but Agatha saw a strangely bitter

smile on her father's agitated face. Yet she nerved herself to the great effort. How did she know that to-morrow would be more propitious?

"Papa, I told mother this afternoon that I had promised to marry Mr. Robert McGrath."

Everything grew unreal about her as she watched the strange smile deepen on her father's face. His answer cut her like a knife:

"Is that so, Agatha? Ah, you show a safe instinct. McGrath is the coming man."

"Henry!" Mrs. Kinnaird cried.

"What will you have?" he answered. "The days of our class in this city are numbered. We were on the losing side in 1861; we are on the losing side to-day. Maybe we've mismanaged. I wouldn't deny it. I merely applaud Agatha's prudence in allying herself to the triumphant cause."

Agatha sprang up.

"Do you think that those are my motives? I understand little of politics, and care less. But Robert McGrath is as true a gentleman as ever breathed—and I love him."

Once more Mrs. Kinnaird leaned across the table toward her husband.

"Do you seriously mean, Henry, that you would consent to such a marriage?"

"Consent? Who am I to rule my child—a grown woman now? But if such a marriage takes place, I trust that I shall be where my father and my brother are—at rest."

II.

MR. KINNAIRD passed a sleepless night. But he controlled himself and did not let his wife see the agitation of his mind. He had a dim sense that for many years he had been floating rather idly with the current of life. But before morning came he had concluded to wind up his turbid affairs by one vigorous action—an action necessary to himself and to the honor of his name. His bearing had a military erectness as he walked to his office at nine o'clock, and Agatha and her mother felt reassured.

Seated at his desk, he unfolded the morning's paper and looked sharply over certain articles and an editorial that dealt with the coming campaign for the

mayoralty. The administration was again accused of laxness and of a misuse of the city's money, but again the mention of his name and person was studiously avoided. With a frown he shoved the sheets into the waste-paper basket, drew his chair forward, and, in his large flowing hand, wrote a brief note. This he despatched by the old negro office-servant, and then sat still and tense to await the result.

Not more than twenty minutes passed. Mr. Kinnaird swung around in his chair as a tall, grave, youthful-looking man entered the office.

"Mr. McGrath?"

The other nodded and took a chair by the side of the desk. Mr. Kinnaird drew himself up and handled the silver paper-knife before him.

"I haven't asked you to see me on any public matter."

McGrath laughed.

"Glad to hear it. I've been told that an attempt would be made to buy me off."

"I do not know of any such plan."

"No, I suppose not." There was a kindly irony in McGrath's voice that disturbed the old man strangely. But he went straight to the point:

"Mr. McGrath, my daughter Agatha told me last night of some foolish and impossible understanding into which she had entered with you."

"Yes?" The young man's tone was patient and wary.

"I am sure," Mr. Kinnaird went on, "that a word will be sufficient to deter you from causing any further complication. It would be highly distasteful to Mrs. Kinnaird and myself, and would finally force us to send Agatha away on an indefinite visit."

McGrath got up.

"It's a pity! Especially as I'm not a bad fellow, though you do think me an outsider; and also because I might have been serviceable—"

"That's just it!" Mr. Kinnaird's face grew crimson under his white hair. "I have observed the immunity that has been granted me amid the slanders heaped on the most honorable names of this State and city. But do you think, sir, that I will sell my child for such an exemption?"

The imperturbable youth looked thoughtful.

"No, of course not. Though that's only one way of looking at it." He came a step nearer and leaned on the desk. "Do you know that indisputable evidence of the gross misuse of public funds under your administration are in my hands?"

"I have heard hints to that effect. It is, of course, impossible, since no such misuse occurred. I am a poor man—"

"Oh, yes; *you*—"

"And the officials whom I appointed, or am associated with, are men whose very names are synonyms for honesty and honor."

McGrath's face grew serious.

"Very well; if that's all you know, it's not my place to enlighten you."

"Precisely. You will, of course, remember what I have said in regard to my daughter."

"Oh, yes; I will remember."

"And act upon it, sir?"

"And—act—upon it."

The young man swung out of the office with an air of grim determination. But, once in the street, his steps grew slow and uncertain. The complete self-possession that characterized him at nearly all times seemed to break up, and he lingered under the trees that lined the beautiful old street.

Then he walked on again, slowly, but in a definite direction, until the white columns of the Kinnaird house came in sight. There he turned into a narrow, flowery lane until he reached the side of the old house. Then he stopped and, with a whimsical, half-apologetic air, threw a pebble against a certain window.

He had not long to wait. In a few minutes Agatha, tall, slender, all in white, stood beside him. He looked long at the ivory pallor of her face, the large brown eyes, and the curved lips. At last he touched her hand gently.

"We've come to the parting of the ways, dearest."

She looked up quickly.

"So soon, Bob?"

He nodded.

"Your father sent for me this morning and put it to my honor to leave you alone."

"Did you promise?"

"I promised to do the square thing."

They walked along the quiet lane where the wistaria-blooms dropped their delicate petals.

"What do you call 'the square thing,' Bob?"

"It's plain enough," he said firmly. "Either we must say good-by to each other here, now and forever, or—"

"Well, or—" she encouraged him.

"Or you must rebel openly."

"It isn't easy," Agatha said, "to hurt those you love—to disappoint them."

"No, dearest." His voice was very tender. "And I don't ask you to do it. I only ask you to believe that I love you wholly, and that in the things that divide your father and myself I have acted according to conscience."

"I do believe that," she cried. "Oh, I do believe it!"

He stopped and turned to her with outstretched hand.

"Good-by, Agatha."

She looked up and saw strange tears in the eyes of this strong, self-confident man. An exaltation came over her that brought the blood to her face.

"Bob," she cried. "Bob, I will—stand by you always."

III.

THE next few days were burdened with suspense and trouble. The date for holding the convention which was to nominate the candidates for the mayoralty drew perilously near, and political passion ran higher than it had done since the days of reconstruction. The aristocratic clique that had governed the city for thirty years was arraigned with virulence and point. It was asserted that the plain people would rule more wisely and honestly. The situation rested on the Kinnaird house like suppressed thunder, and Agatha hardly knew in what form to redeem her promise to the man she loved.

Had her father carried himself proudly or defiantly, all things would have been less disheartening; but he seemed to shrink as from some expected blow. He went late to his office, came back early, and spent most of his time in purposeless brooding.

The blow came. On the morning of the convention, the *Banner* printed an

exposé of the official activity of Frederic Hazeltine, the city treasurer under Mr. Kinnaird's administration. The proof was complete, down to the minutest particular. The Hazeltine Trust Company had obtained fraudulent possession of half a million dollars' worth of city bonds. It was suggested that criminal proceedings be instituted at once; it was affirmed that the present administration had rendered itself forever impossible.

Mr. Kinnaird, sitting at the breakfast-table, quietly handed the fatal sheet to his wife. She ran through the paper in feverish haste and dropped it.

"Is it true, Henry?"

He met her eyes squarely.

"As a lawyer, I should call the evidence complete."

"And you?" she cried.

He stood up.

"I am an old fool. Fred Hazeltine and I stood side by side at Appomattox. I trusted him as my own soul. I would not listen to the accusations that were made against him."

"And now?" she asked slowly.

His tone was forbidding as he answered: "My course is clear, and I shall take it."

Agatha kept silent. She would have liked to put her arms about her father's neck; to have comforted him as one does a sick child. But his pride and the silent judgment of him in her mother's eyes forbade such a display of tenderness. He left the house, and the two women remained alone with their suspense, which, as the hours crept on, rose to the pitch of cruel suffering. They ate luncheon together without exchanging a word. For Mrs. Kinnaird looked stern and sorrowful, while Agatha's heart was overflowing with tenderness for her father.

Late in the afternoon they heard loud cries on the street. The shout of "extra," raised in the city but once or twice within the last quarter of a century, resounded. Agatha, with a strange dread in her heart, ran into the street and bought one of the flaring sheets. Her swift intuition read the truth almost before her eyes could scan the page. Her father had declined the renomination to the mayoralty in a brief but impassioned speech, in which he severed himself for-

ever from the party which, for thirty years, he had appeared to lead.

With slow steps Agatha reentered the house and met her mother's questioning glance.

"Papa has declined the nomination."

"Declined?" Mrs. Kinnaird's tone was full of bitterness, and Agatha's soul flamed up, as at a challenge.

"I think it was splendid of him," she cried. "He trusted all men, and his trust was abused. Would you have him make common cause with thieves?"

Mrs. Kinnaird mastered herself with difficulty.

"You speak like a child. Is our class nothing? Do the memories of our ancestors count for so little? Mr. Hazeltine should have been quietly dropped."

The girl turned away, but every sentiment in her young heart rebelled against so cold and—as it seemed to her—selfish a point of view. Anxiously she awaited her father's home-coming, and her only desire was that she might see Bob at once and hear him praise her father's courage and honor.

When Mr. Kinnaird came into the house an hour later, it was with a quicker and firmer step than he had used for weeks. He confronted his wife at once.

"You have seen the papers?"

She nodded silently.

"I have vindicated my honor," he said slowly and incisively. "I have been made the unconscious instrument of crime. Only an open repudiation could clear me."

Her proud head bent a little.

"Was there no other way, Henry?"

"No other."

The three stood in silence. Agatha stretched out her hand toward her father, when suddenly a clamor arose in the street that grew gradually into loud and prolonged cheering.

Cries of "Speech!" "Speech!" resounded, and Agatha hurried to the window. She saw a banner stream in the evening wind over the heads of the crowd.

"It's the reform party!" she cried.

At the same instant a loud ringing of the bell came to their ears. A frightened servant hurried to open the door, and Robert McGrath, warm, bright-eyed, victorious, stepped into the room.

"You will pardon this intrusion," he laughed, "but the boys insisted that I come in and thank you for your magnificent fight for purity in municipal affairs."

He looked toward Agatha.

"Stand by me now," he said softly as no one answered him.

She came to his side.

"Father," she said firmly, "I promised Bob again that I would marry him. Haven't you a different answer for us to-day?"

The old man stepped forward.

"Perhaps," he said; "perhaps. I have not ruled my own life with such wisdom—"

"With something finer and better than wisdom," McGrath cried; "with trust, gentleness, and honor."

Agatha looked appealingly at her mother, but she made no sign.

Then McGrath turned to Mrs. Kinnaird:

"I'm not such an outsider as you think, Mrs. Kinnaird. My mother was a Hazeltine. It's my own uncle's rascality that I've been after."

"Your own blood?"

"My own blood," he cried; "but we must serve the republic—first and always!"

Then, fearlessly, frankly, he took Agatha into his arms.

THE STEPPING-STONE.

BY ANNE McCLURE SHOLL.

A SHORT STORY.



"DO not believe it!" Mrs. Beveridge said with the overemphasis of unwilling conviction. "It cannot be true. Hugh is the victim of some dreadful conspiracy."

"My dear mother, conspiracies went out with book-muslin, guitars, and ringlets. I do not understand why you should find it difficult to believe that Hugh Stanton is a forger, and—pardon me—that he has been a libertine." He measured her a moment with unfilial eyes. "You were always blinded by his so-called genius, weren't you?"

She winced. If the blow were physical, yet she had long been prepared for it; had always known, indeed, that her son Charles disapproved of the position she assumed in society—her patronage of embryonic lions, her eager desire to form a salon out of a circle once really glorified by her late husband, who had been a historian of eminence.

Most of all, she was aware that Charles resented the fascination she exercised over young men—his contem-

poraries who had outstripped him. He found this as unnatural in a woman of forty-nine, as her girlish figure, her curling brown hair, and her interminable enthusiasms. If she must play the part of a patron to struggling poets, he wished that she would condescend to them, rather than meet them as a synchronal muse.

He was secretly glad that Hugh Stanton had been discovered a thief; this brilliant, erratic, facile man, who had dedicated a book of amatory verse to Helen Beveridge, as if she had not a grown son! Even Estelle had been dazzled by him—Estelle, who weighed most matters with an impartial mind; generous, yet undecieved.

His mother leaned back among the cushions of the couch with the stricken look of the conquered. The ugly news had reversed the decisions of her past years. She saw her friendship with Stanton stripped of its vague pastel colors, and its gentle gloss of sentimentality revealed as fatuousness on her part, good-humored concession on his.

She had dreamed that she was his

enshrined ideal. This awakening threw a ridiculous light on long-age cherished scenes. How he must have jested over her rhapsodies with these women who had kept him poor, and for whose sake he had yielded to the final shame.

Her son seemed to read her thoughts.

"If I were you," he said, "I should destroy all his photographs and letters—everything that bears the mark and stamp of him. I should take his books off my shelves."

Her pallor increased. Her apprehensive glance at him held a child-like appeal. Charles, justified, would not be easy to deal with. He would watch her, always barring her way with this signal instance of mistaken enthusiasm. She looked forward with a shudder to long, unromantic days in which she must question every new interest, lest it should prove an old rogue in disguise, another tempter of the pliant feminine. Yet her pride, outraged, agreed to his proposition. It would be good to put away from her the symbols of her delusion.

He rose, having made sure that she was unhappy.

"I am going to work on my play," he said unwarily.

It was her opportunity. Her smarting spirit longed to inflict pain.

"You'll never forge a note, Charles—and you'll never write a play."

He grew blue, and shriveled in a moment. She had touched the central nerve. Despite his groveling work, his ceaseless, sullen ambitions, he was still "the son of Frederick Beveridge, the distinguished historian," "the son of charming Helen Beveridge." He had never attained what he longed for above everything else, a separated personality, a recognition of the talents in which no one—but himself, apparently—believed.

He was thirty years old, and as yet had proved nothing but his uneasiness. His mother's patience and silence on the subject had always irritated him as the sign of her incredulity. Now that she had spoken, he was outraged.

"How do you know that I'll never write a play?" he retorted. "Must you see to believe? Yet you laud men as lions who have never done anything. You proclaim them. You accept the

tribute of their unpublished drivel. But I am another matter! You've never believed in me, and you let people know it."

Her lips quivered, but she controlled her voice to say:

"That is not true. Didn't we believe in you enough to give you every advantage? We're poor to-day because you had five years in Harvard and two at Göttingen. We believed too much!"

She pressed her pale cheek against the cushion. A stray ringlet fell across it. Some one had told her once that she resembled Mrs. Browning, and since then she had ceased to be ashamed of her curls. Her gaunt, handsome, accusing son gazed down upon her with the truth of resentful years in his eyes.

"I don't accept your estimates of people, not even your estimate of myself. It seems that you are always blinded by your enthusiasms or your prejudices. You thought Hugh Stanton a god—or a half-god. Now he's jailed."

"My judgment was not of his morals, but of his intellect," she replied. "I still believe him a genius."

"For my part, I think he insulted you."

He turned on his heel and left the room. His last words were a sword in her bosom, because she believed them true. Those imageries of beauty with which Stanton had consoled her spirit, those sighs of wistful longings, those epigrams illumining many a twilight conversation—what had they been but veiled insults, avowals that neither her intelligence nor her womanly pride was wholly awake—coquettish, ringleted creature, lustful of marvels as a girl!

Her cheeks burned. Her slight figure, drooping amid the cushions, seemed suddenly to shrink into the childish stature of feeble old age. Her day of sylph-like gesture, of sibylline questions and poetic mystery was over. She must untie the blue sash from the unmaternal waist and play bridge with the other matrons.

The hot tears came as a relief. She had scarcely dried them when the maid announced "Miss Richards." Into the faded, self-conscious room, with its many candles and signed photographs, a young girl entered who seemed the very embodiment of naturalness and health.

She was tall and handsome, in a frank, boyish fashion, yet her manner breathed gentleness, feminine solicitude. She looked as if she, too, had been weeping.

Helen Beveridge fluttered toward her, was embraced and kissed. This girl, at least, understood her, and did not despise her.

"You've heard?"

Estelle's sigh was her first answer. Then she said:

"Did we ever know him?"

"Not on the moral side."

"Ah, there's no other! What does all this glitter amount to without the moral side?" she exclaimed passionately. "Yet, I can't believe that he was deliberately wicked. He was so fond of comet-flashes that he forgot the gulfs."

"How ever will he endure prison?" Helen cried.

Estelle shivered and closed her eyes against an ugly vision.

"It will mean the final ruin, I'm afraid. He is not of the temperament to be purified by suffering. He goes in weak. He'll come out wicked."

"May I ask you a strange question—an intimate one?"

Estelle steeled herself. She conjectured what was coming. She had always been conscious of Helen's jealousy of her where Hugh was concerned—the somewhat helpless, half-hearted jealousy of a woman who likes and admires her own sex.

"You may ask me anything, Helen Beveridge."

"Was there ever—between you—" She hesitated. Estelle answered her promptly:

"Nothing but indirect romance. We couldn't find the clear road. I attached importance only to what he did not say."

"Ah, he spoke so easily—and so well. He wrote well."

"Yes, I had many letters. I destroyed them as they came."

Helen regarded her with frank admiration. What poise at twenty-three not to hoard orris-scented packets tied with white ribbon. She resolved to begin the work of destruction as soon as Estelle departed. She would not let Charles know that the woman he adored was here. It would be too great a forgiveness.

"I am going to destroy everything. I—I always kept his letters for the literary quality."

"You were an inspiration to him. He told me once that he owed so much to your sympathy and understanding. He said you always made him believe that he could accomplish great things."

Helen's eyes filled with tears again, but she smiled like a child who feels that it is being comforted.

"You really think he meant that? Since this terrible news I have been groping in a fog. I've lost all my bearings. I've—I've despised myself for a poor fool of a woman."

A look of tenderness illumined Estelle's face.

"That is wrong. Regret nothing. I know it was true. One of the last things he told me was that you unconsciously had given him many of the ideas for a cherished work he had on hand. He wouldn't tell me the name, or whether it was poetry or prose. He said you were to read it first of all."

"Yes! He sent it to me a few days ago."

"Ah, you have it, then! Have you read it?"

Helen blushed.

"I have not opened it. You see, I want to be in a certain mood when I read Hugh's things. I want calm about me. I want to be solidly alone."

"What will you do with it—afterward?"

"I shall never read it now. I think it would break my heart, knowing what has happened, knowing that—that his life is really over."

"You will send it back—unopened?"

"Yes."

"I suppose it's best. You can't know him now. You can never know him again. There are some gulfs that are impassable."

Helen's voice sank to a whisper.

"You mean the forgery?"

"No, I mean—other things—" She paused. Her face showed suffering.

"I don't want to hear them. Bury it from me."

She wondered if Charles had known much more than he had told her. Perhaps his bitterness had been, after all, in her defense. She felt suddenly peni-

tent, remembering her taunt over his play.

"My son told me to destroy every-thing."

"He's right," Estelle answered.

"I'll build an altar fire with Hugh's letters and pray for him."

"You turn all things into poetry, don't you, dear?"

"I can't face the other side of it. How we shall miss him!"

"You have Charles."

Her words seemed to hold a covert reproach. Helen defended herself.

"I don't always understand Charles, and I can't read him through his works, because there are none."

"There will be some day, I'm sure."

When Estelle was gone, Mrs. Beveridge opened a certain inlaid cabinet. From between its doors came the blended odors of dried rose leaves and orris-root. She drew out the packets of letters. His distinguished handwriting was on each, and his curious seal—winged horses with winged riders and a Greek motto, which she delighted in not understanding.

A fire was laid on the drawing-room hearth. She drew one of the shabby Italian chairs before it and solemnly placed the letters in the heart of the flames, which seemed, to her excited fancy, to burn a deeper gold and purple as they carried his words away to the blue ether.

Nothing remained at last but the manuscript which he had told her contained his masterpiece, the crowning fruit of his literary labors—a four-act play.

She had been conscious of a keen pleasure in knowing that it was a play when Estelle was speaking of it with vague admiration as a mysterious production. She longed to break the seals and read it. Perhaps it might give her some clue to the nightmare—might, like a lightning-flash, reveal for an instant his tempest-driven spirit.

But it had become in a sense sacred—a shrine not to be opened. Many years must elapse before anything from Stanton's pen could be accepted by the world, always too ready to confuse the artist with the man. His genius must sleep in the sepulcher of his sins.

A door opened behind her. She started guiltily. Charles entered. He looked at the opened doors of the cabinet, at the quickened fire; then his grudging gaze rested upon his mother.

"I heard voices," he said. "Did you have a visitor?"

"Estelle has been here."

"Estelle! Why didn't you send for me?"

"I wanted her—to myself."

He did not resent this. In their estimate of Estelle, they were in perfect accord. Only through her personality did each behold the other clearly.

"I am glad you are so fond of her. Perhaps, some day—"

He paused, and the rest of his sentence was in his softened eyes, his transformed features.

"Don't build too many hopes," Helen said.

He sighed.

"Even if—if she consented, on what could we marry?"

His mother was silent. She looked mournfully at the blackened fragments in the fireplace.

"You have burned the letters?" he said at last.

"Yes."

"And you are about to burn that package also?"

"Oh, no! This is a manuscript I am returning to him."

"Will you send it—to his prison?"

She winced.

"I can't—do that."

"Do you wish me to attend to it for you? I can entrust it to Stanton's lawyer. I know him well."

She was silent a moment. Her fingers clung to the package as if loath to relinquish this last link with a happier time.

"It is very important," she said doubtfully. "It is a work no one has seen. I haven't read it myself. I—I shall never read it now. Estelle thought it best to return it unopened."

"She is quite right. Considering the circumstances, you shouldn't have anything of his in your possession. I'll take it to his lawyer."

"Very well."

She handed the package to him and turned away to face gray perspectives. Charles had triumphed in this instance;

but it was a comfort to her to reflect that his authority could never become irksome so long as he had no success to back it, so long as he remained imprisoned in his hopeless ambitions.

She was perfectly sure that he would never produce anything worth while. His cold and critical temperament was untouched by the divine fire. He was at his best in Estelle's presence, for when with her he forgot himself, his egotism lost in a deeper, finer claim. Until Hugh Stanton's overthrow, he had had a formidable rival. Now the brilliant star was extinguished.

II.

"I've come to you first of all to tell you the great news. It means we can be married."

Charles Beveridge stood in the drawing-room of Estelle's little apartment, facing her with feverish eagerness—excited, but not joyous. He appeared unusually gaunt and ascetic, though winning a certain distinction from his visible anxieties, since they were for another and not himself.

Estelle waited for the word, a calm pleasure in her face, which was more than half maternal. She had resigned the heights and depths of romance five years ago, when Hugh Stanton had been sent to prison. Like Helen Beveridge, she had accepted a lesser destiny, a relationship robbed of all spectacular elements. She had become engaged to Charles chiefly because he needed her—because only through her did he seem to touch life at all on its poetic and beautiful side. His love for her had conquered her.

She saw that he was trembling. His dark, melancholy eyes looked haggard.

"What is it? Don't keep me in suspense."

"I am to have a play produced—at last!"

She clapped her hands.

"A play! When did you write it? Why haven't you told me before?"

He did not meet her glad eyes. He spoke slowly, as if with difficulty.

"I've kept it a secret. I—I've been working on it several years."

"The name?"

"The Spinners."

"Good!"

She looked her pleasure. After all, there was something strong and effective in his silences that his mother found so depressing. He could bide his time, await his hour, keep his own council. She wondered what revelation of himself—his reserved, enigmatical self—would be found in this drama.

"When are you going to read it to me?"

"I want you to see it first from a box."

"When are they going to put it on—and where?"

"At the Pleiades Theater—next October."

"Do they think it will go?"

"They think it a masterpiece. Managers think it that—not literary men or poets, but managers."

Scorn was in his voice. His eyes looked defiance at invisible presences.

"They weigh it pound for pound, like butter or candles, you know. Oh, I've been through some sweet scenes with them! Gad! It's a triumph to knock 'em down with a work that is literature! They only see the box-office end of it—the despots!"

He walked excitedly up and down. There was evidently no peace in his triumph.

"You've been through some altercations, I take it," she said in an amused voice.

He smiled bitterly.

"I have—but the play goes on."

"How proud your mother will be!" she exclaimed.

His face stiffened.

"My mother will read the newspaper notices before she expresses an opinion."

"Do her justice, Charles," said Estelle.

"You know she has never forgiven me for being right in my estimate of Stanton," he replied.

"Remember what good friends they were."

"Oh, I forget nothing!"

"You say your mother doesn't know this blessed news?"

"Not yet. I confess, I dread the incredulous look which will be her first expression."

"That isn't kind, Charles."

"You know that she won't believe in me even—even after this triumph."

Estelle sighed. The temperamental antagonism between Charles and his mother was a constant source of perplexity to her.

"Wait and see," she urged.

"I'm tired of waiting. I wait no more, particularly for you! We must be married in the autumn before the play is put on."

"You are sure of a run?" she questioned.

"Absolutely."

"We'll pray for it," she said gaily.

"It's certain," he replied.

He seemed doggedly sure of himself, yet strangely uneasy and querulous—of a temper that needed only a spark to cause an explosion. He took leave of her soon afterward and went home. He found his mother in the drawing-room. This ancient haunt of the muses was shabbier than ever. It had ceased to look artistic, had become merely dull.

Mrs. Beveridge herself appeared ten years older. Her hair was streaked with gray. Her fine eyes were opaque and lusterless. Her old buoyancy, her belief in life as a literary experience had quite departed. The shrine had but few worshippers now.

Charles Beveridge stood before her and told her his good fortune while he watched her face for dawning animation. He had not been mistaken. The first effect of his news was that she looked entirely skeptical.

III.

THE theater was packed; but, as Charles Beveridge realized with a thrill of satisfaction, it was not a paper house. Even the orchestra—that region of doubtful benefit to managers—had been honestly sold out. A favorite star in a play by a new author is always a drawing-card, and the first-nighters were present in full force. Estelle and Charles—lately home from their wedding-trip—and Mrs. Beveridge occupied a box, though the playwright himself was in and out, restless as a wind-driven leaf. His pallor seemed extreme for such a fortunate occasion.

From the back of the box Mrs. Beveridge surveyed the audience with a remote indifference. The old apathy held her even on this auspicious night. She

wondered why she cared so little about the success of the play. Even that little was built on her concern for Estelle, who had been like a daughter to her long before the new relation had made her really one. She looked very lovely to-night, though pale with nervousness. The two women said little to each other.

The first act began. The first lines were scarcely comprehended through that anticipatory preoccupation which held both Estelle and Helen in a kind of trance. Then the scene took dramatic shape—quietly, but with exquisite precision. The proportions of this play of modern life were classic, as clear and satisfying as those of a Greek temple. The lines at times reached the height of great literature, while not losing their dramatic effect.

The two women sat like statues. The same far-off music was sounding in their ears. Both were held by an ancient admiration, a long-past wonder. Both were conscious that, though they had never heard a line of this drama before, it was yet hauntingly, cruelly familiar—like a face that will not be dismissed until it is recognized and greeted. The recognition was delayed.

Helen and Estelle groped through the shadows of another incarnation—listening, waiting, oppressed with elusive memories—at times lifted up to a far height of joyful reminiscence, again doubtful and unhappy.

The audience, having no such double consciousness, was being led a willing prisoner, loving its chains, delighting in the play. The critics were overjoyed to be absorbed by so good a piece of work.

The third act brought a climax of unusual novelty and power. The roar of applause would not cease until the author came before the curtain. Beveridge, stiff as a stone image, was propelled to that position by invisible friendly hands. His eyes had a kind of anger in them as he stood irresolute and frowning, his mouth one straight blue line of suppressed excitement.

Helen Beveridge shrank back in the box and closed her eyes. She felt suddenly ill and faint, oppressed with a horror of she knew not what. The dead years had spoken from those lines—old enthusiasms, winged epigrams, wit bril-

liant and frosty as the stars on a winter night, poetic emotion fragrant as vernal flowers. The cry of the heart, the dancing lights of the brain, the sweet ministry of friendship, all were there.

He made some acknowledgment—in disjointed, harsh, reluctant speech—and was allowed to retire. He came then to the box, facing there an audience more dreadful than the oppressive one he had just quitted. Estelle looked up bewildered and mute. His mother was still sitting with closed eyes.

"Well!" he demanded. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

"It is wonderful!" Estelle faltered. "It makes us—silent."

Helen Beveridge opened her eyes. For a moment she and her son gazed fearfully at each other, as two spirits who might meet before the judgment-bar.

"Estelle is right. It makes us silent. We can't even—praise."

He sat down awkwardly behind them and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He breathed like a pursued man now safely within the fortress.

At the end of the fourth act they made their way out with difficulty. Friends detained them, showered congratulations on them, demanded of Beveridge his method, or the sublime hour of his inspiration. He made efforts to escape.

They were at last in the lobby, when a singular figure approached them—a man chalk-white as if from many sunless days—unshaven, unkempt, thin, and gaunt. He wore a shabby business suit, his shoes were unblackened, his linen frayed and soiled. The deep, burning eyes alone identified him.

Mrs. Beveridge gave a little cry, paused, saw her own agitation mirrored in Estelle's face. She moved her lips, but no sound came. She took her daughter-in-law's arm and clung to her helplessly.

Beveridge stood like one who sees a specter. Estelle, looking from Stanton to him, saw that her husband's face was blank with fear; then his expression changed to one of defiance. It sharpened to a menace.

All was over in an instant. Stanton, with one glance at Helen's white, appealing face, stepped back. The play-

wright, with the two women, moved mechanically forward. Estelle half turned and held out a hand. The shabby creature bowed, but did not take it. His hollow voice came to her as from a great distance:

"Thank you! Believe me, all the thieves are not in jail!"

She hurried on, wondering if the words had been but the sick echo of her own fainting heart.

"What did he say?" Helen whispered.

"I don't know—he muttered something."

"Intolerable impertinence," said a man who had joined them, and who had been a witness of the scene. "Our deluded Governor pardoned Stanton yesterday."

IV.

"Has Charles come in yet?" Mrs. Beveridge asked Estelle.

"Not yet. He told me that he might not be at dinner, that he might have to wait to see a manager."

"They always keep him waiting nowadays. It is strange that he has never been able to follow up his first success."

Estelle avoided her mother's eyes. This was as near as they ever came to expressing the sinister doubt with which they had lived ever since the night of Charles's triumph, six years before. As the waves of it died away they had found themselves marooned with a man to whom success had brought neither peace of mind nor permanent self-possession. He went from periods of gloom and restlessness to hours of almost insolent triumph—the latter far more trying to the two women than his fretful depression.

All the while he worked feverishly on new plays, which were invariably turned down; at first with the apologies due to a successful dramatist, afterward with scant courtesy. Debts had eaten up even the large royalties; and the household, after its bridal freshening, had returned to the old economies, the old, unilluminated round.

Helen Beveridge, never middle-aged, had gone from prolonged youth into feebleness. She was now, at the beginning of her sixties, bowed down and weary. She had but one interest in life—the preservation of Estelle's hope and con-

fidence. Between them they had established the fiction that all was well, though both never forgot the lurking shadow. Unconsciously they played the detective.

They looked for a confession in Charles's lightest moods, in his most casual words. He felt their espionage and showed his resentment of it in a hundred trivial ways.

Estelle broke the silence that always grew too heavy for them to bear.

"You know, perhaps, that there's still another play?"

"No, I did not know it."

"He has been working on it for a year and a half. He tells me it is almost finished."

Mrs. Beveridge shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose it will go the way of the others."

"We must pray that it doesn't. We must pray for his success."

She knew in her heart that she longed for proof that "The Spinners" was his, and not another's. For years the doubt had tormented her, growing darker with each of his failures, growing heavier with the increasing uncertainty of his temper. Yet she excused much in him, because he seemed to her like a man who suffered acutely, yet whose personality shut from him the magic healing of sympathy. She longed to trust him utterly, that she might the better bind his wounds.

He came in after a while with the dogged air which always announced another failure. They asked him no questions, and after a while he demanded if they had lost all interest in the outcome of his work. Estelle spoke soothingly:

"We were afraid things hadn't gone right."

"Well, they haven't."

"It's a long lane, isn't it?" she exclaimed.

"There will be a turning," he said confidently. "I have a play in my desk now that will get past them. After it's staged it will get over the footlights."

His boast seemed to her but vanity. She asked him:

"Is it nearly finished?"

"Three days more work."

"Did you bring an evening paper?" his mother inquired.

A flush of annoyance darkened his face. The petty question betrayed her entire indifference to the subject of his ambitions. He rose and went into the hall, returning with the paper.

"Do you want it?" Mrs. Beveridge asked.

"No. I'll read it afterward."

She opened it and glanced through it. Suddenly she broke the silence with a little cry of surprise.

"Hugh Stanton is back from South America."

"Stanton!" Beveridge exclaimed. "I thought he went down there to remain the rest of his life after that stupid Governor pardoned him."

"He is ill—it seems," Mrs. Beveridge said in a low voice.

"Illness won't restore him to decent society," Charles commented harshly. "He was turned out of all his clubs. I wonder that he has the assurance to come back."

He swung out of the room, and they heard his heavy tread on the stairs. Mrs. Beveridge looked across at her daughter, her eyes bright with tears.

"Charles never gave him credit for the good there was in him. We saw it, didn't we?"

"Yes, we saw it. What does the paper say?"

Mrs. Beveridge read the paragraph. It stated that Hugh Stanton had returned from South America in a dying condition. He had been received into the house of some friends in this city.

Estelle sat for a long time silent.

"I should like to see him again," she said at last. "I wonder if I could get his address from his lawyer."

"His own family lawyer died soon after the trial," Mrs. Beveridge answered. "I never knew him, but Charles did. He took the manuscript to him."

"What manuscript?"

"The one I told you of—the one you advised me to return unopened."

"On—that—morning! Ah, I remember! You say that—Charles took it to the lawyer?"

Mrs. Beveridge avoided her eyes.

"Yes. He promised to attend to it for me. I had no heart—no will to do anything at that time."

Estelle rose and began to pace up and down the room, her head bent, her hands clasped nervously. She paused at last before Helen's chair.

"I wonder why he never tried to publish anything—after the disgrace."

"He couldn't over his own name, and publicity was sweet to him. Poor fellow! He would not have taken pleasure in incognito."

"I should like to see him," Estelle repeated.

Mrs. Beveridge kept silence. As the mother of her son, she must never acknowledge that anything could be possible but his perfect integrity, his spotless honor. Yet her thoughts were mutinous, accusing. She knew that Estelle read them and understood.

They all met at dinner, silent and unsocial. After the glass of California sherry—their sole remaining luxury—Charles brightened a little, and confided to them that he meant to write half the night. He was sure of himself at last.

Estelle listened, and formed her resolution. The torment of six years must be ended before she could have the courage to go into the future with her husband. That night she wrote two or three letters of inquiry regarding the present address of Hugh Stanton to old acquaintances of his and of hers.

One answer came promptly. It contained the desired information. He was living—or rather slowly dying—at the studio of a friend, situated on an old-fashioned square of the city. Estelle remembered both the friend and the studio. She went there the next day.

Chadwick Burns, Stanton's host, kept her waiting for a few moments in the big, bare, coldly lighted room, with its litter of canvases and easels. A gallery crossed one end of it, reached by a flight of stairs. At the head of the stairs was a door, from which a figure at last emerged and came slowly down to her.

"He is extremely weak to-day, Mrs. Beveridge. The doctor has forbidden all visitors, but Hugh insists upon seeing you."

"I'll not stay long. You know, we were old friends."

"It was most good of you to come. So few have come."

He led the way up the stairs.

"Nothing agitating," he warned her.

She made no reply. The question must be asked, come what might. He accepted her silence, and led her to the door of the room. On the threshold he said:

"You must be prepared for a great change."

She nodded, and went past him into the dimness. The sick man lay on a narrow bed, Hugh Stanton no longer, only a sufferer sinking into nameless mortality.

What had ever been true in his life and purpose was concentrated in his large, clarified eyes. Looking at him she knew that no affairs of earth could agitate him again. He was too near the shadowy border. He had entered into the divine indifference.

His transparent face grew luminous as he beheld her.

"Estelle," he whispered, "this is good."

"I wanted to see you again."

"It is *addio*, dear."

"I know," she said softly. "I've come to say good-by; but, before that, I want to ask you a question."

"Yes," he whispered.

"You will give me a truthful answer, Hugh?"

He smiled faintly.

"I can speak nothing but the truth now. What is it you want to ask?"

She took his wasted hand in one of hers.

"Wasn't 'The Spinners' your play?"

"Yes, I wrote it," he said simply. "I sent it to Helen. Did—did she—"

"No—thank God! She never even opened it. She sent it back—as she thought—to your lawyer, after—"

"Yes; go on."

"She sent it back by—her son."

"Yes," he whispered; "I understand."

"She thought he took it to the lawyer. Charles—must have kept it."

Her voice quivered with her shame. He pressed her hand.

"Poor Helen! I wronged her. I kept silence for her sake. Besides, who would have believed me. I was just out of prison. My word was less than nothing. I had no proof."

She caught her breath.

"The proof has come since. He has never been able—"

She broke off, quivering with emotion. All her pent-up pity flowed suddenly toward this poor wreck, robbed of his little last claim to be remembered and honored. She bent toward him, her tears dropped on his hand.

"I'll make it right, Hugh. I'll make it right. He must do you justice."

A smile quivered over the man's emaciated features.

"Estelle, I don't care now. I could have killed him then. He had my play—he had you. I don't care now. Your coming makes everything right. It is enough. It is more than enough. Will you take my farewell to Helen? Poor woman. She never really knew me. I was never worthy of her friendship even from the first. Take her my prayers for her forgiveness."

"Yes, Hugh."

"God bless you, Estelle. It will be easier to face the darkness now."

"Oh, may Heaven make it light!" she cried. Then solemnly bade him good-by and went from him.

V.

IN the days following Hugh Stanton's death Estelle saw little of her husband. She spent most of her time with her mother, upon whom Stanton's messages had worked a great change. She seemed to recover something of her old faith in herself, and in her power to be a guide and inspiration to others. Estelle listened to endless reminiscences of long-ago symposiums, while her own thoughts were busy with her ever-present problem.

How should she approach her husband, how communicate to him her knowledge of his deed? What reparation should she demand of him? Her sense of justice cried out for full, public confession and acknowledgment, but whenever she looked at Helen Beveridge her heart refused its sanction of this demand. In humiliating the son, she would have to abase the mother—the mother far nearer the son through her mysterious maternal bond than the wife to the husband.

She could not shadow Helen's closing years with open disgrace. Helen suspected the truth. Of this she was sure, but she buried it away. She had asked no questions of Estelle on her return

from Hugh's death-bed. She had listened and accepted joyfully her own share of his remembrance.

The days slipped by, and nothing was accomplished. Beveridge had sent in his latest production anonymously—so he told them—that it might have a fairer chance. His nervousness during the interval of waiting was intense; but he seemed possessed of a strange confidence that made an unwonted atmosphere of geniality about him. If nervous, he was not carping. He seemed, indeed, living in a sure world of his own. Estelle watched him, wondering when she could find the fitting hour to speak and tell him that she knew who had written "The Spinners."

She was seated one afternoon with her mother, listening to Mrs. Beveridge's glorification of past days, when Charles entered. She saw at once that something unusual had happened—something that carried him far beyond mere excitement and nervous exaltation into a calm region of sureness and safety. He looked happier than he had in years—quietly happy, as if a winding path, beset with dark terrors, had suddenly opened into a broad, safe highway. His voice trembled a little as he addressed them.

"It's all right. They want the play; and—and they want it so much that it will not make any difference when they know that I wrote it."

Mrs. Beveridge looked earnestly at him.

"It's really so?"

He smiled upon her.

"It's really so, mother. Estelle, why don't you congratulate me?"

He stooped and kissed her forehead. She had grown very pale.

"I do—congratulate you," she said. "I'm glad you've proved—"

She closed her lips on the sentence, but he did not notice the betraying word. He had the dazed air of a man long under sentence of death, and now reprieved. His manner, when he addressed his mother, was gentle, solicitous, as if at last he were in the position to bear her burdens, to uplift her faith in himself.

At dinner he chatted gaily, telling them the plot of the play, which was called "The Stepping-Stone." His pride

in it was transforming him before their very eyes. Estelle, watching him, realized what the depths of his bitterness must have been all these years, as he labored to justify his theft, to equal the thing stolen, to surpass it, as one would say: "See, I have gems of my own, finer than those filched." He wore his proper diamond proudly.

Her eyes accused him. It seemed to her that he must hear the quick beating of her heart, must read her unhappy thoughts. Her love of him, long in abeyance, struggled with her bitter knowledge. She was nerving herself for her deed of justice—for her demand of the only reparation now in his power to make.

When dinner was finished she asked if she might see him alone in the library within an hour's time. He answered that he was immediately at her service. Should they go in together now? She declined. She would see him in an hour's time. He looked puzzled for a moment, then resumed his happy peace.

She spent the interval in fortifying her will against all possible pleading on his part. When the time had elapsed she went down into the library. He had been smoking, absorbed, apparently, in pleasant forecasts of fame and prosperity. He rose and drew up a chair for her.

"What is it, dear?" he asked, with concern. "You look very white. When our royalties come in you must have a change, poor child."

"I am not well," she answered. "I have not been well for a long time."

He nodded.

"This money-grubbing saps the very life-blood."

"It wasn't the poverty," she replied. "I could bear that always if I had an easy mind. I have not had an easy mind since—just after our marriage."

He turned his head slowly and looked at her.

"What—what has been the trouble?"

"Don't you—know?" she replied.

"Why—how—could—I—"

She waited. The silence closed in upon them. She heard his quick breathing. He spoke at last, half angrily:

"How could I know?"

"I'll tell you. I've been tormented—with doubt."

"Doubt?"

A dark red flush clouded his face.

"Yes—doubt of you."

"Why—what—do you mean?"

He spoke the words with a choking sound. She seemed to see the dark water rising to his lips—above his lips. His eyes looked defiance through the gloom between them.

"I've doubted you ever since the first night of 'The Spinners.' The terrible suspicion has now become a certainty. You—stole—Hugh Stanton's play."

He turned a sinister, livid color. His eyes for a moment filled her with mortal fear. Then he breathed again, became the man she knew.

"Are you mad, Estelle?" he cried in a suffocated voice.

"Can you deny it?"

"I deny it utterly."

"What became of the manuscript you took to his lawyer?" she demanded. All her pity had hardened in the face of his bravado.

"How should I know? I delivered it. I had nothing further to do with it."

"You never delivered it."

"Proof?" he cried.

"The proof of style and language, to begin with—Hugh's very self. The last proof—his dying word. I suffered—your mother suffered, that night in the box. The same thought was in both our minds. Coming out we met poor Stanton—robbed by you of his last chance. He said to me as I passed him: 'All the thieves are not in jail.' I didn't know an easy moment afterward. I wanted to ask him then, but he left for South America. As soon as he returned I sought him, asked him for the truth as he lay dying. He gave it to me. He had kept silence for your mother's sake; and, besides, he had no tangible proof. His word was less than nothing."

"Yet you take it against mine?" he cried.

"It is—the truth."

He was silent. His head drooped. She saw that he shivered as if with an ague.

"For God's sake, Charles, acknowledge this," she cried. "Put the lie from your soul that we may at least be able to face each other; that we may know how to go on together."

He buried his face in his hands. His form was shaken with tearless sobs—the agony of his dead years released at last. His muffled voice came to her like something human heard in the pauses of a tempest.

"I did it for you. I was sick with waiting—waiting for fame, for money that I might claim you. I struggled against the temptation a long, long time. The play lay in my desk for weeks and months. I was always going to return it the next day. I wanted it, yet I was afraid. I did it for you—at last."

"You must make reparation," she said solemnly.

He raised his head, gazed at her from his purgatorial fires, his face white and sharp, full of a dawning terror.

"Reparation?" he whispered. "How? He's dead."

"You have written—a play—a play that is to be produced."

"At last. I had to, or die."

"They do not know who wrote it?"

The look of terror deepened in his eyes.

"No," he whispered.

"You took his play. You must give him yours."

He stared at her. His lips moved, but no sound came.

"You must give him yours," she repeated.

He put his hand to his throat.

"My play—my first born—the only one—"

She averted her eyes.

"You must tell them it is his, entrusted to you for production. You took his glory. You must give him yours."

He grew rigid, still as those who lie in the grave and have no power of resurrection.

"I—cannot—"

"You must."

"My play. Estelle. My first—my first honor won through those long years, those dreadful years."

His voice sank, an agony of entreaty in it. His stricken face implored her. She rose to the last bitter woe of her appointed task.

"You must do it, or I will leave you forever. I will leave you to-night. You must choose. You must pay the price. You must pay the penalty. Give back what you have taken. Only so can you reach—the greater things"—her voice softened—"but, if you refuse, I go."

"You loved him?" he cried in agony.

"Yes. I loved him. I lost him. I loved you, too, else why should I suffer—suffer."

She wept, hiding her face from him. He watched her in silence for a while, appalled by these summons to a height he could not reach—despair, love, hatred struggling in him. She rose after a while, all her love and longing in her eyes.

"Must I go?"

The applause after the third act of "The Stepping-Stone" did not subside even when the manager stepped before the curtain. The audience had greeted the drama with the enthusiasm it fully deserved.

The tumult was stilled at last. The manager spoke:

"I am here to represent Mr. Charles Beveridge, to whose devotion to a friend's memory you are indebted for the production of a remarkable drama. The late Hugh Stanton, despite the lamentable incidents that marred his troubled career, was a man of genius, and no better proof of this statement can be had than this, his posthumous play. We thank you for your appreciation of a dead poet's work. It is not only Stanton's masterpiece, but it is one of the best plays presented in many years. We also thank Mr. Beveridge as an able and faithful executor of this literary legacy. The light of friendship never burned with a clearer flame."

THE WOOD THRUSH.

ONE perfect strain adown the twilight east.

Then all the wood is mute;

It is some lyric spirit of the past

That has been dowered with Apollo's flute!

Ross Hamilton.

MISS JACK OF TIBET.*

BY CHARLES WILLING BEALE,

Author of "The Onyx Ear," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

THE Ganders, a London club of globe-trotters, commission Peter O. Gallomeade to go in search of his friend and fellow member, Gwynne Roedler, who has disappeared while on an expedition to Assam. Peter is summoned by a queer old German to a remote part of London, where he discovers that the German is no other than Roedler in disguise. Roedler is going into Tibet to rescue from a Buddhist monastery two American girls, Misses Jacqueminot and Jill Varney, daughters of missionaries, deceased. Roedler is in love with Jacqueminot, but is actuated also by gratitude because, through the aid of the girls, he made his escape from the monastery. Roedler empowers Peter to lay a bet of a thousand pounds at the club that Roedler will reappear the next club-day, October 15.

He proposes to reach the lamasery of Tad-sa-fuh in his air-ship, following the course of the mysterious lost river, Tsanpo. He describes the region as a world of enchantment and a labyrinth of horrors, where he has discovered something that impels him to return there.

Toko, a worthless servant, steals their yaks and abandons them without guide or means of transportation. Gwynne leaves Gallomeade alone on the road for a time, where he is suddenly accosted by a snake-charmer, who, after several occult performances and the appearance of the Ya-ti ghost, gives Gallomeade a parchment with a symbol inscribed upon it.

Gwynne returns, and they push on with a vague hope of being on the right trail. Days pass without sight of a human abode. Just as they are going into camp one night, Roedler, with a wild cry, calls Gallomeade's attention to one of the heights.

CHAPTER XI (*Continued*).

TWO STRANGE ENGLISHMEN.



HERE, high up among the towering walls of granite, gilded with the rays of the setting sun, was perched the fantastic pile of some vast gomba or monastery. Story upon story, tier upon tier of windows, a part of the cliff itself, the great structure stared garishly down upon us. We should have passed it but for an accident, so thoroughly at one was it with the huge rampart that supported it.

To shade his eyes from the glare of the sinking sun, which at that minute dipped from a cloud belt, Gwynne had lifted his hand and turned his head aside, when there, in the full glory of parting day it stood—a unit with the cliff that held it.

We drew up the ponies and looked

around. It was the signal to the weary yaks that the day's work was about to end. Gwynne took off his hat, waved it, and sent up a shout of exultation. I followed his example and then said I wished it was Tad-sa-fuh.

"But it's not, young man, nor is it anywhere near it. Be satisfied if we can find rest, shelter, and a guide up there. I doubt if Tad-sa-fuh is within a hundred miles of where we are, and you'll probably call it a thousand before we reach it."

"Probably! I've seen enough of this country to believe anything you tell me." And I had.

The cattle were still drifting along slowly. It would be unwise to let them stop, as it was still a half-hour's climb to the first wall of the gomba.

It was nearly dark when we got there, and the manis, or prayer walls, showed the strange nature of the place we were approaching. Here upon every side

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for September.

was carved or painted those mystic words:

Om Mani Padme Hum.

It was wild, fantastic, outlandish. Barbaric paintings of devils, grotesque monstrosities of men and beasts, warnings to the evil-doer of the swift vengeance that was sure to follow and overtake him in the pursuit of wickedness, forcibly described in the terse and pithy tongue of the Bod-skad. Of course this was all explained to me by Roedler, whose enforced stay in this enchanted region had afforded many opportunities for knowledge.

At the portal, we were met by a monk in flowing robes. From his neck there hung the strange insignia of office—the bell, the beads, the amulets, the human thigh-bone fashioned into trumpet form, the cymbals, the conch-shell. It was all very wild, very fantastic, and grotesque. The man had a kindly face. He looked wonderingly from one to the other of us, and then at the yaks and ponies. I was still mounted, while Gwynne was making known our wants.

In a minute there was the sound of a bell, followed almost immediately by half a dozen lamas—novitiates—who made haste to unload our cattle and relieve us of all trouble. It was clear that we were invited to enter and make ourselves at home for as long as we pleased. It was an indescribable relief after the hardships we had endured. To our weary eyes, Gim-ra was a haven of rest.

Gwynne and I supervised the unloading of the animals and saw that the cargo was properly disposed of, before entering the building. It was evident that we had stirred the curiosity of the lamas to the very limit. What did our luggage contain? Where were we from, and where were we going? We entered a great hall with pillars of rough stone, placed at irregular intervals. In the center, upon a raised hearth, was a fire of *je* which we found most comforting after our ride in the chill of early evening. Half a dozen butter-lamps were burning about the room, which with the ruddy glow of the fire combined to make a strangely weird, yet cheerful light. There were some large, uncouth

chairs, entirely covered with sheepskin—tanned with the wool on. They made comfortable seats, and Gwynne and I pulled up a couple and settled ourselves in the recesses of their padded luxury.

In a few minutes we were joined by the monk, and by means of signs and such words as could be understood, a fair exchange of ideas was established. Yes, he had heard of Tad-sa-fuh,—but had never been there, and when Gwynne mentioned the name I thought I detected a quick look of suspicion, but in a minute this had given way to one of simple wonder. The lamasery we sought, he declared to be the most remote and inaccessible in all of Tibet. He knew of no way to reach it—it was in the moon—to attempt the river passage was certain death.

"The outlook is not cheerful," said Gwynne, turning toward me. "But I've been there once, and can go again!"

He asked how the lamas got there. The priest shrugged his shoulders and seemed to say he didn't know; at all events that it was none of his business. It was evident that he took no interest in the brotherhood, save, possibly, to keep its locality hid from prying eyes.

Presently tea was brought; a huge saddle of mutton, and some cakes of barley. It was a feast after the monotony of camp fare, and we set to with a vim.

We had only been eating a few minutes when we heard some loud voices in another room. I caught Gwynne's eye. He had evidently noticed what I had, and for a minute we sat still and listened. Yes, there were no mistaking it—the words we heard were English.

Another instant the great sheepskin curtain at the farther end of the hall was pulled aside and two gentlemen entered. Our surprise was mutual, and for a minute the strangers stood staring at us while we paused in the act of eating, to return the look. Then Gwynne got up and a general introduction followed. They were two Englishmen traveling through Tibet—Fenchurch and Chumley by name—and we gathered around the table as if we had been friends of a lifetime.

"Strange how meeting one's own people in such a foreign land will pro-

duce at once the strongest feeling of friendship," Gwynne was saying as he reseated himself at the table.

"Not strange at all, my dear sir—it's the most natural thing in the world. After all, Tibet isn't in the world, is it?"

Mr. Fenchurch pulled up his chair.

"Therefore those that are from it have the more reason to congratulate themselves upon meeting. I believe the deadliest enemies would embrace under such conditions. See! My friend and I may be a couple of bank robbers—murderers—escaped from justice. But what difference does it make! I'm sure you Americans would help us get away, even if you knew it for a fact—eh?"

Chumley laughed as he dipped into his tea.

"And my friend Roedler here, may be a member of the Black Hand, and I an unpretentious highwayman taking a summer vacation in the hills. But what matters it? We speak the same tongue, have breathed the same pellucid air of London and, doesn't the Bible say something about blood being thicker than water?" I asked.

"It's a great thing to know that you know there is a Bible, my dear sir. Your knowledge of the fact is a mark of the profoundest erudition, for, after all, wisdom is geographically discerned. What we should regard as such in the wilds of Bhutan, would be simple ignorance elsewhere. May I trouble you for the tea?"

We chatted along pleasantly enough. It was a relief, it was positive joy to hear one's own language spoken again, and by men who appeared in every respect to be gentlemen.

After dinner we pulled chairs to the fire and filled our pipes. The Englishmen smoked also. The old monk sat at a little distance and listened. It is doubtful if he understood a word, but the mystery of it all seemed to charm him.

It transpired in the course of the evening that Chumley was much the younger of the two, being twenty-eight; while Fenchurch was nearly forty, and an officer in the English army, whose regiment was stationed in India. From Srinagar these men had watched the snow-hills of the Himalayas and been smitten with the

sense of mystery that enshrouds them. They had come together to look behind the veil, they said, and were completely satisfied.

"A pleasant summer vacation!" I observed.

Chumley nodded. Neither seemed inclined to give an account of his experience, though there could be no doubt that they had gone through much, from the mere fact that we had found them at this remote and isolated monastery. It is true that they spoke of having had trouble with their guides, and of being lost on one occasion for three days.

It was another bond of sympathy between us, and led to some further details of adventure; but there was the usual English reserve when we expressed interest regarding their future course. They seemed quite undecided as to whether they should penetrate farther into the wilds of Tibet or return to India.

Later in the evening, we discussed the strange habits of the people, the customs, and peculiarities of the Tibetans. We were able to do this with impunity in the presence of the lama, as he knew practically nothing of English. This led me to speak of some of the prevailing superstitions; the people's faith in demons and powers of evil; their strange, reliance on incantations, charms, sorcery, magic, witchcraft. Fenchurch looked up and Chumley warmed to the subject.

"As an example of their belief in these things," began the younger man. "let me give you a case. There's an old Tibetan story about a female apparition that haunts the country and ascends to the tops of the highest mountains, where she recuperates her powers only to strike death and terror to the souls of all who chance to see her; at all events to those who fix their eyes upon her for more than a minute. So firm is the faith in this creature that men have been known to drop dead with the mere suspicion that they have seen her. It is looked upon as the very worst of omens. Of course no one ever *has* seen her, for the simple reason that such things don't exist; but there are those who firmly believe that they have and who have nearly died of fright. They call this specter by the name of Ya-ti, and there's

a story that she recently appeared to some travelers."

Gwynne and I exchanged glances.

"I confess I shouldn't like to come across the old lady," Chumley continued, "neither should I care to encounter the werewolf. There's probably no chance that I shall be called upon to face either of them—but here's a bald fact. A caravan was stampeded lately by the Ya-ti woman—explain it as you may—and the most remarkable part of the affair is, that the animals saw it, too. Of course nobody but a fool would believe such things, and yet these men will swear they saw it and that they have been pauperized through having their yaks stampeded by the ghost. Fools? Of course they're fools—but they've lost all they had!"

"I believe in the Ya-ti woman," said Gwynne quietly, "for I've seen the thing, myself."

The Englishmen stared as if they thought we were demented; or, perhaps, no better than the natives. It was a full minute before either spoke.

"Pardon me, but surely you do not mean to say—"

"But I do, I mean exactly that, and my friend, Mr. Gallomeade will bear me out, for he also has seen the ghost of the Ya-ti woman."

I told the Englishmen we had both seen the thing on the same night and that no Tibetan story could exaggerate it.

Chumley and Fenchurch continued to stare.

"Well, of course you saw something," proceeded the elder man, "and I've no doubt it looked very much like a ghost; but do you, can you understand—"

"I don't pretend to explain it," went on Gwynne, "but I can readily understand how a whole drove of cattle could be stampeded by the thing we saw, and I dare say a weak-minded person might be driven into idiocy by the sight. There is nothing more firmly established in the minds of the Tibetans than the fact of the Ya-ti ghost."

"You mean the so-called fact!"

"So-called, if you please; but I saw it myself."

"And you believe in it?"

"I believe in what I saw."

Fenchurch leaned back and roared. Chumley said, "Rot!" Gwynne took their skepticism good-naturedly and re-lighted his pipe.

"Must say I don't admire the lady's taste," added Roedler. "The natives say she is the only thing in human shape that has ever been to the top of Kunchingga, where the sun looks like a copper ball and the stars shine at noon."

"Not surprising she has to visit the lower regions to get warm occasionally."

"Or that she hovers over camp-fires in doing so, eh?"

"You may laugh, gentlemen, but neither my friend nor I felt like it when the Ya-ti woman appeared to us, and I can only hope that she won't come again," said Gwynne.

We sat up talking for some time, and in the course of the evening learned that the Englishmen were stopping at the monastery for rest and with the hope of procuring a guide. The last one had apparently deserted them, as ours had. They were in no great hurry, but were ready to go whenever the right man turned up. They spoke vaguely of their plans, though intending, they declared, to push farther into the north toward the great plain of central Tibet. No, they had no intention of visiting Lhasa, not wishing to be taken prisoners.

Before going to bed, more tea was brought, then we had another pipe apiece, after which we parted for the night.

While it always gave me the creeps when the lamas were about, it was particularly unpleasant in the vast gloomy passages of the monastery after night. Some one was generally prowling around, and a wilder, more savage-looking horde, with their long hair, singular features, and fantastic garb, would be hard to imagine.

CHAPTER XII.

A SKILFUL MANEUVER.

THE time was flying. Tad-sa-fuh seemed as far as ever, while the prospect of winning the bet grew fainter. Each day we hoped that some traveling tribesman would turn up who was familiar with the country, and who

could be induced to escort us to the lamasery of Tad-sa-fuh for a proper remuneration. But the thing we desired did not happen; at least not then; and when it did, the fellow positively refused to have anything to do with us.

It was impossible to understand his behavior. At first he was eager enough to enter our service; but when he heard where we were going, nothing would induce him to listen. He would not even say if he knew where the monastery was. He had heard that there was such a place—he had also heard that it was impossible to reach—and then inconsistently added that all were put to death who got there.

There was something about the man's behavior that made us believe he knew more than he would tell. That he knew the way, but that there was some ulterior motive that made him refuse to act as our guide, we felt assured.

One evening Gwynne found himself upon more confidential terms with the Englishmen. It is possible that they had had a drop to drink, though in those altitudes it is literally taken by the drop, and that they became more genial. At all events, we talked late and smoked more pipes than usual.

Fenchurch was leaning over the table consulting an army map of the country which he had just taken from his pocket. Chumley was looking over his shoulder.

"All I can say is, I wish we were there!" said the younger man, returning to his seat by the fire.

It was the first intimation we had that they wanted to get anywhere in particular. Gwynne blew the ashes from his pipe and drawled with seeming indifference:

"Where?"

"Tad-sa-fuh," answered Chumley.

"Who the devil is Tad-sa-fuh?" asked Gwynne with a yawn.

"It's a place, not a devil, though I shouldn't be surprised if there were lots of devils there," answered the other.

Gwynne was hard at work with his pipe.

"Name of a mountain, I suppose?" remarked Gwynne with growing apathy.

"Well, no; not exactly; another of these infernal religious madhouses. By the by, speaking of the Ya-ti woman,

she's not in it with the ladies of the Tad-sa-fuh!"

"You're a little mysterious, Mr. Chumley. What do you mean by ladies of the Tad-sa-fuh?"

Gwynne was pressing the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. Somehow, it didn't quite suit him.

"Oh, it's a queer story and a long one. Sky-pilot and his wife both died up there. Left a couple o' chicks behind them—girls. That's years ago—grown up now. The story leaked down through the hills to Srinagar—and—well, Fenchurch and I are onto it, that's all!"

Gwynne yawned.

"And where did you say this Tad-fuzzy place holds forth?" asked Roedler indifferently.

"Ah! That's the question," chipped in Fenchurch. "That's what bothers us. It's here, of course"—he tapped the map with his pencil—"but how to get there. It's the most remote, the most inaccessible monastery in the whole of Tibet. Old Varney must have been an adept to have found it."

"Well, I hope you'll get there all right," said Gwynne. He got up and lounged toward the table.

"Where did you say it was?" he asked, glancing over the officer's shoulder at the map, which was still spread out before him.

"Here!" said Fenchurch.

"And I suppose you intend to bring the ladies away with you?"

"Oh, well, rather—if they'll come."

"Held against their will, I suppose?"

"Yes—at least so the story goes."

"Doubtless they'll be glad to see you, English, I believe you said."

"That point doesn't seem to be clear. Some say Varney was an American."

"He was certainly an enthusiast!"

"Undoubtedly—I should call him a fanatic!"

"And I suppose one of the ladies will become Mrs. Chumley, the other Mrs. Fenchurch," laughed Gwynne.

"Who can tell? More remarkable things have happened."

"Well, not much more," returned Roedler. "At least, I should be greatly surprised if I found out later that it had really happened."

"Why?" Fenchurch inquired, glancing up at the man beside him.

"Oh, nothing; only such things don't often happen, that's all. You might not find the ladies exactly beautiful, you know, and they might not find you all they looked for in a husband. If they should turn out to be a couple of hags, now—"

All this time Gwynne was studying the map, though with seeming indifference. For my part, I was working my pipe for all it was worth, and was afraid I had overdone the act, when the lama sneezed, got up, and left the hall. But my confidence was restored when he came back with a churn of tea, some barley-cakes, and butter.

Gwynne asked the Englishman how soon he intended to resume this wild and romantic journey, to which query the other replied that he hoped to get off immediately, or, at least, as soon as his guide could get things ready.

"You have really found a guide, then?" said Roedler, showing interest.

"Yes, the fellow that came yesterday. You've seen him. He talks as if he knew everything, and says the trail from here to Tad-sa-fuh is a most dangerous one; but agreed to take us over it, though I confess he asked an outrageous price. To tell the truth, I haven't any confidence in these men, and I dare say he'd sell us out for a trifle; but it's the best we can do, and we must take our chances."

"We shall miss you! It will seem lonely here without you," Gwynne replied. "And you leave when?"

"In the morning, probably. If not, as soon after as possible. All depends on the way our new man works."

"Well, I sha'n't say good-by—only good night and *au revoir*. We shall certainly hope to find you here in the morning. It's good to hear a chorus of English-speaking voices after being so long alone together."

I seconded all that Gwynne said, and added my best wishes and hopes for a speedy marriage. I also refused to say good-by, really believing that we should meet again.

Later, in the privacy of our own bed-chamber, I whispered in Gwynne's ear:

"Checkmated, old man!"

"Who?" he whispered in return.

"Why, we, of course!"

"No, they!"

"What do you mean?"

"I've got the bearings on Tad-sa-fuh. We're at Gim-ra now; both places are on the map. Tad-sa-fuh is two hundred and fifty miles to the westward of our present position. Doubtless that darned Toko took us out of the way to rob us; and if it hadn't been for the Ya-ti woman, we should have lost all we had. Ghosts are not such bad things, after all. Saw me studying the map, eh? Well, I've got it—and I've no doubt his guide is the one we tried to get. Bribe, or offered higher price. But, thank Heaven, I know where Tad-sa-fuh is at last!"

"But," I objected, "how are you going to get there without help? Is the path so easy?"

"On the contrary, there's no path at all. What that fellow may know about trails over these hillocks is more than I can tell. So far as the map shows, Tad-sa-fuh can only be reached from where we are by crossing a dozen of the most terrible mountain ranges on earth. Of course, there must be passes—but how to find them?"

"That's why I say 'we are checkmated.'"

Gwynne laughed out aloud.

"Nonsense! It's they who are checkmated! We shall be at the lamasery of Tad-sa-fuh long before they are over the first pass, and days before their feet shall have touched the highest ground."

"And without a guide?"

Gwynne tapped his pocket.

"Guide's in here!"

He referred to his compass.

"But, my dear fellow," I began, "do you mean to say that you intend to crawl like a fly over these barriers, and through these regions of the upper air, by glaciers, pitfalls, precipices, deserts of eternal ice and—"

"I shall travel straight as a bullet from the mouth of a rifle. I sha'n't bother with guides, trails, or mountain passes. I'm going to Tad-sa-fuh, direct—at once. No power on earth shall stop me. Do you understand, Pete?"

He was walking the floor impatiently.

"When do you intend to start?" I asked.

"Now!"

"And how do you expect to perform this miracle?"

He stopped suddenly and fixed his eyes upon me. There was something of the daredevil in them as he answered:

"Have you forgotten the air-ship?"

As a matter of fact, I had often thought of it; but generally in the light of a toy, and of no practical value. I replied that I recalled his experiment in London with interest, but couldn't exactly see how he was going to use it here.

"It's an air-ship," I said; "not a mountain-climber."

Gwynne pulled down his eyelid.

"You'll think it's both before we get there," was all he said.

The idea of crossing the Himalayas in an air-ship was so preposterous that I had scarcely given it a thought. Of course, I knew that the thing, in a knocked-down condition, was a part of our luggage, and I thought probably Gwynne intended to make some experiments with it at a suitable time and place, and I had sometimes joked him about not using it.

Knowing, as I did, that the fellow was an inventive genius and always at work upon something, I looked upon the air-ship as a freak, a kind of fanaticism he would probably outgrow when convinced that it wouldn't work outside of a London garret—or, at most, in a metropolitan fog. It was a trick, a fancy, a fad, though doubtless a clever one; and I could not doubt it would cease to amuse when the inventor was convinced of its worthlessness. I stared at him for a minute, scarcely believing my ears.

"Gwynne, are you losing your mind?" I said at last.

"I've already lost it! It's in the air-ship, where yours will be too before very long."

He was walking the floor again. Suddenly he pulled out his watch.

"Half after eleven! We must wait until the place is quiet!"

There were faint sounds, as of a weird chorus, somewhere in the distance. The monks were chanting their midnight hymn, and at stated intervals there rose upon the air the strange, al-

most uncanny words—*Om Mani Padme Hum*. It was like music from another world—from the land of dreams. Gwynne held up a warning finger.

"Hush! Not a word!" he whispered.

Presently the music stopped. There was the distant tramping of many feet, then all was still.

"A minute more, and the bell will ring," said Roedler softly. "Then lights out and the lamas tumble into bed. Another hour, and the place will be quiet as a haunted graveyard!"

And it was so.

"We will now sleep for a couple of hours; at least you may, if you wish—for my part, I shall lie awake."

Gwynne looked apprehensively at the door as he said this.

"What then?" I asked wonderingly.

"Tad-sa-fuh!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EMPTY STOREHOUSE.

I THREW myself upon the bed, but it was impossible to sleep. At two o'clock Gwynne put his hand upon my shoulder. I was up in an instant.

"There'll be a moon about three or a little after," he whispered. "We must be ready to take advantage of it."

I pulled aside the sheepskin curtain and looked up at the stars. There was a faint mist that partly screened them.

"Darned folly!" I muttered. "What do you intend to do?"

"Get right out there in the cold and rig up the air-ship."

I could hardly believe him.

"Why not wait until after the Englishmen have gone?" I ventured.

"We'll be sure to rouse somebody, get arrested, and held on suspicion. We are certain to make better time if we hold over for daylight and go off respectably."

Gwynne grunted.

"Hustle into your clothes."

But I was prone to argue.

"Absurd. Wait and go off decently; rig up the flier somewhere down the valley. If we undertake to get the yaks out at this hour, there's sure to be a rumpus—and—"

"But I don't intend to disturb the cattle at all."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I've thought it all out. There's no way we can leave here minus a guide without exciting suspicion. We shall need all the time we can get. Something may happen. We must reach Tad-sa-fuh before the others. Will you get a move on?"

The "Will" was strongly emphasized, and I saw it would be useless to argue.

We dressed quietly and quickly, and then moved noiselessly down the great corridor of the central building. No one was astir. Not a sound to startle or alarm us. We reached the outer portal, passed it, and slipped quickly down by the manis wall. Here, in the semi-darkness, these wild heads of man and beast glared down upon us.

We had brought the horn-lanterns from the room we occupied, and they just shed enough light upon the distorted faces, the monstrous bloody paintings, to make them appear even more gruesome than they did by the light of day.

Our rough baggage had been carefully stowed in an outhouse, just under the lower wall. It was a massive stone structure, and was really a part of the main building, which seemed to ramble on indefinitely, though there was apparently no interior passage or means of communication. Gwynne had been given the key to this room, the lama telling him there would be no extra charge for its use.

All the paraphernalia for the air-ship, as well as the heavier luggage, had been placed there. We only carried to our sleeping apartment such things as we required for immediate and personal use. The cattle-yards were yet farther down, and all was still in that direction.

Gwynne paused at the door. Lifting his lantern, he seemed to be looking intently at something he saw there. He was slightly in advance, and I observed a look of horror upon his face as he drew back from the portal. Our feet were heavily swathed in sheepskin, and I ran toward him without fear of noise. I shrank back in consternation at the sight that met my eyes.

Gwynne put a hand upon my shoulder, while he held up the light with the other.

"That wasn't there when we came, was it?" he muttered.

I denied having seen it before.

"It's a bad sign. We must get away as soon as possible."

The horror that confronted us was this:

Upon the door of the outhouse was painted the nude figure of a man, save for the head and feet, which were real, and dripping with blood. At least, such was the appearance. The head was undoubtedly real, with the eyes and mouth wide open; it is possible that the blood was paint. It was a most gruesome sight, and as we stood there the long hair waved gently in the breeze and the eyes reflected the light of the lantern as if alive.

I asked Gwynne what it meant.

"Simply to warn us off," he answered. "I don't know whether it's to prevent our reaching Tad-sa-fuh, or because they imagine we've got a lot of treasure here, which the holy brothers require. Which ever it is, we must make our escape as quickly as possible, or we'll be trapped."

"Somebody must have been murdered in the last day or two," I replied, holding my lantern close to the head of the corpse.

"Nonsense! It may be as old as a mummy," Gwynne said; "nothing decays in this atmosphere. Like as not, it's an old joke, and may have reaped many a rich harvest for the priesthood."

Gwynne took out his key and began fumbling at the lock. But it didn't seem to work. He looked at it with suspicion.

"All right when I locked it last. Locked it myself," he said.

It was a huge iron affair that might have been made in the Middle Ages.

Gwynne examined the chambers for dirt, blew them out, and polished them with his handkerchief. Still, it didn't work.

"Needs oil, maybe," I suggested.

"Probably; but where to get it?"

"Here, can't we get some of this butter out of the lantern?" I was shaking mine gently to ascertain the condition of its contents. Butter is not only the great food staple, but the illuminant of the Tibetans. The horn was about half full.

"Good enough, if we can get it out," Gwynne replied, also shaking his own.

"We've got to do something, and pret-

ty quick." I was beginning to feel a little apprehensive.

Gwynne said we must be careful, adding something about the danger of being left in the dark in case we couldn't put the thing together again. But we tried it.

I blew out the light, picked up the wick, and sloshed it about over the key. This time it went in and turned without a sound. The instant the door swung upon its hinges a draft blew out Gwynne's lantern and left us in the dark.

We both muttered something like profanity, and began fumbling for matches at the same instant.

But the draft was still blowing strong through the open doorway, and blew them out as fast as lighted. At last Gwynne stepped inside and succeeded in coaxing the butter into a flame. We looked around. The place was empty.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROEDLER'S MACHINE.

WE stood facing each other in dismay. All our heavier luggage—food supplies and clothing, together with the mechanical parts of the air-ship—had been stowed there. Practically all our possessions had disappeared.

"Treacherous hounds!" Gwynne growled.

It was evident that we were trapped in the enemy's country, and that the enemy's country was far from our own. For a minute I think we were both stunned by the revelation.

"There's something in that word 'Tad-sa-fuh'; I should never have uttered it. It has worked against us always. They're determined we sha'n't get there. But I'll turn Mount Everest upside down before I'll give up the Varney girls!"

And Gwynne cursed the lamas.

"We must find the air-ship if we have to blow up the monastery!" he continued presently.

I demurred and said something about the impossibility of doing it—that we were in the grip of the enemy.

Gwynne turned upon me with fury.

"Impossible!" he roared, forgetting the necessity for quiet. "Heavens, man!

Do you realize what's at stake? Nothing's impossible with me!"

I told him to shut up; that he would rouse the entire lamasery. Fortunately the room was so heavily walled that no sound could escape.

We now looked carefully to our lamps, lest we be left in the dark. There was oil enough to last some time, though the light was poor. We next examined the walls of the apartment. At the farther end was a door. Gwynne tried the lock. It was fastened.

"It's in there they've moved our stuff," he said, tapping lightly upon the panel.

I asked why he thought so.

"Because there was too much of it, and it's too heavy to carry far. These fellows are lazy, or they wouldn't lead the life they do. They simply moved our luggage out of reach, as they supposed. But, Pete, we'll show them a trick worth two of that."

He was already trying the key, but it refused to enter.

"There's a key to that door somewhere, and we must get it," he said—"and we must get it before the moon rises, if—murder—"

"Hush!" I repeated.

In the yellow light I saw that Roedler was determined. I half believed the lamasery was in his keeping. He went to the outer door and looked up at the sky.

It would still be an hour before the moon could climb over the snow-peaks to the eastward. It was the stillest hour of night.

"There's a key to that door somewhere, and I'm going to find it!" Gwynne said again, turning once more to the smoky chamber. How he expected to accomplish his purpose was a mystery. He pressed his hand to his forehead, and for a moment was buried in thought.

"Peter!" he said, looking up suddenly. "I've seen a key-rack somewhere in the place—but—can't remember exactly—"

"To the left of the entrance door in the great hall," I put in, recalling the fact that I also had seen it there. "But there's one chance in a thousand you'd get the right one—and—"

"We'll get 'em all," said Gwynne.

"It's impossible," I retorted. "There must be more than a hundred—and—"

But I couldn't finish the sentence, for he was gone, leaving me alone in the ill-smelling, lamplit cellar. I confess it was not cheerful.

In a minute he was back. The wind had blown out his lamp. I saw it was a case of more haste less speed, and begged him to let me go after the keys, as I remembered exactly where they were. He consented, giving me a final word of caution about noise.

Strangely enough, the main door of the lamasery was never locked, its latch being controlled by a cord, which was supposed to be out of reach and knowledge to any but the monks. Knowing the secret of this, there was no trouble about entering.

I stepped lightly—moved slowly—but do what I would, the great portal creaked dismally as it swung open. I had not observed this when we passed out—perhaps Gwynne had been more careful. For a minute I stood listening, lest some member of the establishment had been roused. But all was quiet.

The key-rack was still there, but I didn't know what to do. I couldn't take them all—it was impossible—they would have weighed over a hundred pounds, and I had nothing to put them in. So I picked out a dozen of the most promising, gathered them in my arms, with the lantern, and started off.

Again the pictures on the manis walls glared and stared at me as I passed. Probably never had there been such cause for disapproval.

Gwynne met me at the door. He was growing impatient. I dumped the keys upon the cellar floor, and he began at once to try them.

One, two, three, four were thrown away in disgust. They would not even enter the hole.

Number five went in, but wouldn't move. Six, seven, eight, and nine were positively useless; but ten slipped in easily and turned.

Entering the dingy trap, our baggage was disclosed.

"Some of these things we can do without," said Gwynne hurriedly. "I ought never to have brought 'em; but we must

fall to on the air-ship without a moment's delay."

The most important parts were quickly pulled out, and together we carried them into the great courtyard. Such other articles as were necessary were carefully placed beside the mechanism of the vessel, and, under Gwynne's direction, I went to work.

From time to time we stopped to listen, for even with the greatest caution it was impossible not to make some noise. The monks were early risers, but we still hoped to get off ahead of them. It was hard to see in the dull glow of our lamps, for the moon was not yet risen.

The work of putting the air-ship together went on quickly. Everything had been carefully prepared and perfectly adapted to its place. I was filled with admiration for Roedler's daring and inventiveness.

The ship was not more than twenty feet long by—probably—five or six in width. I was amazed at the marvelous arrangements for comfort and storage. Although largely composed of rattan and rubber tubing, these were so compact and carefully put together that there was a sense of solidity coupled to that of marvelous lightness.

Luxurious chairs, inflated cushions and beds, large hampers and wicker baskets, toilet sets, and a tiny table were some of the appliances. There was but one dread: Would it fly? Gwynne shot a glance of disgust toward me when I asked if he were sure of this.

"Do you suppose I've come all the way to Tibet without finding that out before I left London?" he answered.

There was nothing to say, but I could not help feeling a trifle nervous.

But the work of setting up the thing progressed rapidly.

Tubes were to be screwed together, placed in position, and adjusted. Great cans, hermetically sealed, were to be carefully handled, lest their contents escape through straining the package. I thought perhaps they contained some peculiar gas, but there was no time to ask questions. I was busy with wrenches, screw-drivers, steel nippers, and muffled hammers.

The thing took shape. It grew. There were canisters for chemicals which Roedler would not allow me to handle,

placing them himself with care and caution. There were brass cylinders, chests, caddies, coils of insulated wire wrapped in silk and stored in glass receivers. It was a marvel of mechanical construction. But—I was eternally asking myself the question: "Will it fly?"

"We must hurry!" said Gwynne. "There are signs of the moon over Kunchinginga."

I glanced up at the sky. A faint, silvery line was beginning to illumine the farther peaks. We redoubled our efforts. Thus far there had been no indication of rising monk, or suggestion that our work had been discovered. Peacefully the lamas slept.

From time to time we were obliged to stop, in order to warm our hands over the flame of the smoking lamps. It was but temporary and very slight relief, at best, but the nights in Tibet are always cold, and the coldest part of the night is just before day.

But the moon was getting stronger, higher. The snow was taking on a crimson tinge. The great walls of the gomba loomed black and lowering in the paling of the peaks.

With a single skilled mechanic to help him, Gwynne could have done the work in half the time; but with my untrained and blundering hands it seemed eternal.

Suddenly there rang out upon the air the sound of the rising bell. The rusty, iron-throated monster—I could have cursed it!

"Don't be discouraged! There's plenty of time yet," said Gwynne. "And, see, we're nearly done."

And it seemed so, for the mechanism was all in place. It was the superstructure alone that we were fitting. Then we would tumble in the luggage—take our own places within, and—be off!

"They're a lazy lot," said Roedler. "It'll really be some minutes yet before they stir; and when they find us out, dear boy, we'll be up, up, above the clouds, almost to the moon."

I told him I hoped so, as I hurried ahead with the work. The ship was a beauty, and, to my untutored eyes, the perfection of form—the realization of its power.

On we worked silently, steadily. It was nearly done. But there were sounds of

moving within. The earlier and hungrier of the monks were afoot. They would soon be on us.

"Pull that lever over to the last notch and clench it!" called Gwynne, a trifle louder, perhaps, than was necessary. But it didn't matter much now. The courtyard would soon be alive with the lamas. The news could not be held much longer.

"Now bear a hand with the yellow tube," he called again. "No, not there; pass it over the blue one. So. Now!"

The orders were given quick and fast. Sometimes I was right, sometimes wrong.

Looking up, I caught sight of a couple of monks. They were standing just above, near the upper end of the yard.

For a minute they looked at us stupidly, not appearing to understand what was being done. Then suddenly they turned and hurried into the building.

"They'll be on us now in a minute," called Roedler, who had also observed them. "Hold taut to that line, and see if it lifts the valve. Now, then—up with the luggage!"

We jumped to the work with a vim, tumbling in packages of every size and description, helter-skelter. The last bundle was scarcely aboard when I heard a shout, and, looking up, saw fifty lamas running toward us.

"Now! Over the side! Quick as you can!" yelled Gwynne.

With a single bound I jumped aboard.

"Hold fast! We're going up!"

Gwynne pulled a lever—then another—and another.

But the air-ship did not budge!

CHAPTER XV.

FLIGHT BY NIGHT.

THE lamas were upon us! They had evidently suspected our intention of going to Tad-sa-fuh; or, perhaps of making away with treasure which they had hoped to capture. Of course they could have known nothing about the air-ship, though having faith in some unknown power to outwit them. Their very ignorance of the world had doubtless bred an unreasoning confidence in its achievements.

Half a dozen hands were already upon the taffrail, while a score of others were

brandishing knives immediately behind them. Our danger was imminent—our lives in peril—the destruction of the vessel seemed assured.

At that instant Gwynne dealt a crushing blow with his horn lantern upon the head of the foremost and most savage looking of the leaders. The thing broke and the oil ran over the fellow's hair and clothes, setting them afire. There was a momentary howl of dismay while the man stopped to beat out the flames, at which some of the others helped him. This gave us a chance. Seizing the proper cord, which had somehow got out of place, a strange thrill passed through the machine, and Gwynne called again:

"Hold fast! We are going aloft!"

Never shall I forget the sensation of that minute, or the look of consternation upon the lamas' faces as they watched us rise slowly above them. Higher, higher, into the cold moonlit air, beyond their reach, above the towering walls of the gomba. The stillness of death was beneath us. From those gaping mouths no sound escaped. It was a sight to remember! Never was there such before!

"Now, hold fast to your hat!" called Gwynne, his hands grasping tightly the cords and levers. "I'm going to sweep into the west. Those brutes will soon be out of sight."

Then came the rush of air. The plunging of the heart that marks the birth of flight. I had entered another world. My breath came too quick for speech, nor could the old vocabulary have served me if it were not so.

On we swept, like a ship at sea, while Gwynne's eyes were fixed upon the compass. Fainter and fainter came the shouts of the disappointed men beneath—more visionary the walls of their citadel.

Then the lights went out—a dull gray mass, hopelessly blended with the mountain, was all that remained of the lamasary of Gim-ra. It was a weird scene, a strange and weird experience. Down into the east it had sunk, with its turrets, cliffs, and towers; its horde of uncouth denizens.

I pulled the sheepskin close about me, and looked wonderingly at the world beneath. An ocean of billows, heaving,

tossing, it appeared to be. Chaos reigned, the earth was topsyturvy, while over and above the turmoil writhed and curled the morning mists; giving the effect of motion to the whole.

Upon every side were the snow-bound giants of the Himalayas—mountains of unutterable, indescribable grandeur. Among these terrors of the night we must tread our way. Above these shimmering billows we must sail. The mystery of what lay below was only equaled by the sky above. If we had been lost before, what should we call it now?"

Suppose the air-ship failed. Suppose it came to earth and refused to rise. How, in that vast and trackless region, those awful solitudes, that strange, silent, enchanted land of mystery, could we ever hope to escape? I think Gwynne must also have been awed by this thought, as we swept over the seething caldron beneath.

Save for the sharp cut of the wind as it whistled by, there was not a sound. No creaking of parts, no whirl or hum of machinery, no suggestion of mechanical effort. The vessel stood as steadily upon her course as the moon above. There was no swaying or uncertainty. She was as solid as when standing upon the ground in the courtyard of the gomba.

Of course, I could only guess at our speed by observing the flowing landscape beneath, but I was sure it was greater than at any time since leaving the Brahmaputra steamboat. There was no sense of fear, and the situation was not only novel, it was exhilarating; entrancing, ecstatic!

There are some things one cannot describe—the very effort to do so is distasteful and belittling to the thing itself. To know what it feels like to fly, one must fly. To know what it is to fly in Gwynne Roedler's air-ship, away from that savage horde of murderous devils in the Gim-ra lamasery, one must do it. The witchery of that night can never be forgotten, unless its memory be effaced by the greater witchery that followed.

But the cold gray light of dawn was striving with the moon for mastery in the eternal snow-fields above and beyond us. The ghosts of the Himalayas loomed in

awful splendor, guarding the secrets they had guarded since the world began, and which they will continue to guard till the end of time.

But at last the struggle was over. The mystic spell of the moon gave way to the sunlight. The clouds of the valley, the yeasty ferment of the hills, were swallowed up and we were warm.

By nine o'clock we stood directly over a plain which was watered by a tiny stream, but which gave no sign of life. Not even a goat or yak could be seen, though the herbage appeared to be good. Gwynne had lashed his levers, made fast his cords and steering apparatus, and was taking off his sheepskin coat. I followed his example in removing the heavy top garment, as the heat of the sun was momentarily increasing.

Thoroughly thawed out and looking over the side of the vessel, Gwynne pointed down and said:

"I think we'd better make a halt down there. Looks like a good place."

I asked what for, to which he answered:

"Breakfast!"

The place looked pleasant enough as it smiled up at us with its sparkling thread of water and myriads of wild flowers, and I seconded the motion, though I had not yet thought of such a thing.

Then gradually we settled down upon the earth.

The sense of power in the mastery of the air—the ability to rise or fall at will—was more deeply impressed than ever when we touched the ground again. It was an ideal spot for a camp and the air-ship came down as lightly as a feather.

I was bursting with enthusiasm, not only for the vessel, but for the man who had contrived and built it. I seized Gwynne by the hand and congratulated him. It was impossible to express my feelings.

"You're a wonder! You've solved the problem of the ages. I can hardly believe it!"

Gwynne received my homage philosophically.

"Seems to be all right as far as she goes," he answered. "Let's hope she'll keep on going."

I told him I was sure that there could be no doubt about it. The thing had proved itself.

"Well, we won't halloo too loud till we get out of the woods, at any rate. If she carries us safely to Tad-sa-fuh, and away again, with the Varney girls, I'll throw up my hat, sure!"

I was quiet.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"Simply, that in the hurry of getting away from Gim-ra, we forgot to pay our bill."

Gwynne laughed.

"My dear fellow, we paid it ten times over. Didn't we leave all the yaks and ponies with them?"

Roedler seemed indifferent about the property; and, as it belonged to him, I had to be satisfied.

We built a fire and made tea, which, with some dried kid and barley cakes, together with old butter and treacle, made an excellent breakfast. Then we sat down to enjoy our pipes.

I asked Gwynne if he had any idea how far we had traveled since leaving the lamasery. He looked at his watch.

"Four hours and over—well, let me see; probably not less than forty miles—maybe more."

"And you're quite sure about the course?"

"So far, yes—but we may have to do some guessing when we get among those big mountains there. We may get tangled up in the sky peaks."

I reminded him that he had spoken of going straight as a bullet. He looked at me compassionately.

"Straight as a bullet part of the way, sure, but a fellow couldn't breathe up there. Pete: though, maybe, after all, we'll have to take our chances in a thirty-thousand-foot altitude. I don't want to get lost in the sky! It'll be like threading a rusty needle to work our way through those turrets, domes, and obelisks, among those snow-bound cañons and precipices. Remember, we're not fooling with common-sized mountains. The valleys in the Himalayas are as high as the top of Mont Blanc, while the upper regions are—well—simply unapproachable."

"To an ordinary tourist, yes—but

why couldn't we sail directly over them? It isn't as if we had to exert ourselves. We'll only have to reach the proper altitude, put the vessel on her course, then cover up and keep warm. It won't be for long, and these sheepskin rugs will carry air enough from the valley to get us safely over. It seems to me that by doing so we wouldn't run the risk of getting lost—provided, of course, that you've got the right line to the lamasery."

Gwynne laughed at my simplicity.

"We should be blackened corpses long before straddling the highest ridge. But, what's the use, we couldn't get there! The machine has lungs as well as we!"

And so I had to give it up.

After breakfast we overhauled the machinery. It had stood the trip perfectly—not a bolt or screw had been strained. Not a tube, cane, or rattan loosened.

He was winding up something that moved a disk near the center of the vessel. I asked what it was for.

"To control her weight. I can make her light as a feather or heavy as lead. It's a matter of vibration. You've heard of the gyroscope?"

"Rather!"

"Well, there's a similar principle involved. Of course there are other things—and—gases. But what's the use. I couldn't explain in five minutes

(To be continued.)

what has taken me years to evolve. What most concerns us is the fact that she'll fly."

There was no sign of life upon the plain. We had built our fire out of brushwood, a kind of dwarf willow that grew by the water. As there was nothing near to disturb it, we anchored to some of these bushes, and then walked off to stretch our legs. The grass was luxurious and it surprised us that there were no animals to crop it.

We had walked probably a third of a mile when we observed what seemed to be a group of large boulders on the grass a short distance beyond. Their size and appearance struck us as peculiar, and out of place, and so we concluded to go a little further to investigate.

Our surprise may be imagined when we discovered that the supposed boulders were a dozen or more large yaks, standing perfectly erect, but stone dead. There was no indication of the cause, or of how long they had been there in that condition, neither was it apparent why they had not fallen.

It was a gruesome sight, and Gwynne and I went from one to another, examining each in turn and making sure there was not a living one among them. They stood there motionless, and as silent as carved images upon the plain, their heads to the ground as if grazing, but without a show of life in any of them.

PEPITA'S WALTZ.

BY THOMAS R. YBARRA.

A SHORT STORY.



WHEN I had known Pedro Ortega a month, I respected him; when I had been in Venezuela twelve hours, I loved him; when I had been there twenty-four hours, I admired him with an admiration positively unbounded. It came about thus.

"I'm going to Caracas," I told him. "Ah," he said, twisting his mustache, "you shall have a letter of introduction to my cousin Fernando."

And, true to his word—Pedro invariably is—he appeared at the dock on my sailing day.

"Remember," he said in his matter-of-fact fashion—"for business dealings,

there is but one Ortega. His name is Pedro. But for hospitality and friendliness and *dolce far niente* and charm and—and—and all that makes South America not North America, any of the Ortegas is a king. Any of them—all of them. All of them—except Pedro; all—especially Fernando. Here's your letter. Good-by."

And he shot down the gangplank and along the dock, absorbed once more in his multifarious New York affairs.

So I had foreseen dinners and things as a result of that letter; what I got made me rub my eyes. It began when a victoria drew up in front of my Caracas hotel, and a gentleman inside it commanded me to entrust my trunks to his servants without delay, and myself to him without protests of any kind whatsoever. There was nothing to do about it. The gentleman was so handsome and so overjoyed at seeing "*un amigo de Pedro*" that, within twelve hours of my arrival in Caracas, I was out of it again, at Bello Monte, which is the finest sugar estate of the whole valley, and has for two hundred years belonged—as every one knows—to the Ortegas.

There I was, sipping the best coffee I had ever tasted, and listening to young Fernando Ortega—my kidnaper—as he declared over and over again:

"Ah, Pedro. Pedro es clever. Jess! Ees very clever man."

Everything around seemed to me the tropics incarnate—absolutely and entirely foreign. The veranda on which we were lounging was brick-paved; the night air was of undreamed balminess; the stars, in their millions, of a luster unbelievable.

From inside the mansion came the notes of a genuine Venezuelan waltz, played by a genuine Venezuelan girl, Fernando's fiancée, who was spending the week at Bello Monte—"a small body entirely surrounded by chaperones," he had called her, in introducing me. Even the foreign-made furniture seemed to fit, by some mysterious woodeny process, into the whole. But the most appropriate ingredient of that whole was Fernando—swarthy, exotic, explosive Fernando. There indeed, thought I, is the right man in the right place.

So I felt astonished, to put it mildly, when he knocked the ashes from the end of his cigar and observed:

"Once I wanted to be a New Yorker."

"No!" I exclaimed with such vehemence that the Venezuelan smiled.

"At least I thought I did," he resumed; "and, what is more, I would have become a New York business man—if my cousin Pedro Ortega had had his way."

"Pedro!" The picture which rose in my mind of Pedro Ortega—he who out-New Yorked New York every day of his life—was so vivid as to justify the amazement which I threw into my exclamation. Pedro Ortega try to make this amiable, indolent, charming tropical product a New Yorker! My amazement was such that Fernando laughed outright.

"Yes, Pedro attempted the impossible," he said; "and I was heart and soul in his conspiracy to deprive Venezuela of the most Venezuelan of Venezuelans, when I was saved by—listen—by that!"

He waved his hand toward the parlor abutting on the veranda. From its open windows came the notes of a Venezuelan waltz—one of those little gems of melancholy which seem to have caught into themselves the country's very heart-throbs. On the melody flowed, now smooth, now curiously syncopated.

Then it came suddenly to an end. From within, Pepita's voice sounded, demanding that Fernando and I come into the house to amuse her.

"*Sigue, mijita!*" said Fernando in the gentlest of lovers' voices. "Play your waltz again." Once more the opening notes floated through the window, over the veranda, out into the starlight. Fernando's eyes glistened with tears. He brushed them aside in some embarrassment.

"That—that is Venezuela—my Venezuela!" he murmured. "Pepita's waltz—that's what I always call it. It is what kept me true—what kept me a Venezuelan—in spite—" he laughed softly, "in spite of Pedro."

"Oh, you must tell me about it," I said.

"Well"—Fernando puffed at his cigar—"we must have the proper accom-

paniment to the story. Pepita—*tú valse otra vez.*"

"Again?" bantered Pepita, from within.

"*Si*—over and over again," commanded Fernando.

And to the subdued sound of the sad little air—twin, so it seemed to me, to the breeze whispering through the sleeping bamboo-groves—Fernando told me this.

II.

"LAST year I got restless. Caracas began to shrivel before my eyes; a something crept into every morning's view of the unbroken Avila range, which crushed my chest, stopped my very breathing. Life seemed to lie beyond those mountains somewhere, out across the Caribbean, northward, where hustle was, and machinery and money and sky-scrapers.

"I snapped up every piece of reading about your country that came in my way. Finally, I figured out that my life was unendurable and my business talents wasted. So I sought my father, and told him with great impressiveness:

"'I will be a New Yorker.'

"'You—a New Yorker?' This in such tones of unbelief and sarcasm that my blood was up at once. I reiterated my statement—striking a determined attitude.

"He eyed me.

"'And leave Bello Monte,' he remarked, 'which one day, not so far off, will be yours? Lose the knowledge you have of sugar-planting, the only business for which you are fitted? My son—is it prudent?'

"I said nothing.

"'Leave me?—your mother?'

"Still I was silent.

"'And Pepita?'

"He looked into my face, but I was sullenly resolved.

"'Don't go, Fernando,' he said; and he quoted the old Spanish proverb, 'Better be the head of a mouse than the tail of a lion.' It did no good.

"'Well, as you please,' he sighed then; 'I, too, in my day, scorned my father's good advice. The tragic part of having experience is that we may not share it with those we love. Go, then, to that foreign land, where you will

have the husk of life, never the kernel—where you will live a foreigner and die a foreigner.' I laughed incredulously: for, you see, I was young and he was but an old man.

"The night before I was to sail, I well-nigh changed my mind. About me were my mother and sisters, weeping softly; my father, oscillating between anger and melancholy; and Pepita—Pepita, who kept stealing over to the piano to play—that—" In his pause we caught more distinctly the cadence of the little waltz. "Yes, I felt like giving up the whole business.

"But—bah! With the morning sunlight, all the lust of change came full upon me again; mine was the only light heart at Bello Monte when I vaulted on my horse to ride to the Caracas railway station.

"A week later I was gazing in bewilderment at the sky-line of New York, while Pedro Ortega, a letter from my father in his hand, eyed me in *blasé* superiority. Two weeks later he had got me a job.

"It was the regular job that your young South American gets in New York—first-aid wherever the Spanish language interferes with the ordinary smoothness of business. My office-hours flew past more rapidly each day, bringing to me the evenings, each with a new fairy-land to be explored. My New York was a haze of surprises and raptures. What it had of novelty I mistook for the long-sought ideal; and I felt that I was becoming an American by leaps and bounds.

"Pedro, as you are well aware, is a phenomenally busy man; but he managed to keep an eye on me. We used to make a practise of dining together about once a week at a pet restaurant of his, where waiters sprang to attention at his approach, and the orchestra-leader set his musicians to sawing out 'La Poloma' and mysterious things, strong with the scent of Broadway and rag-time, which, we were assured, were Spanish or Mexican or Cuban. There Pedro catechized me one evening.

"'Happy?'

"'Am I?' I ransacked the Spanish language for rapturous adjectives.

"'Like the job?'

"Do I!"

"Nice people in the office?"

"Oh, such amiable people! Why, Pedro, there is one little blond stenographer—"

"Hm," says Pedro, "go on."

"One little stenographer, who is the most beautiful, the—" How fatuous I must have looked and sounded right there—"the most delightful girl in the universe. Pedro—she—she has asked me to call on her."

"Chews gum?"

"Adorably."

"Asked all about you?"

"Has she? Oh, I should say!"

"Found out all about your family—and the plantations?"

"You bet!"

"Pedro was silent a while. Then he suddenly leaned forward and slapped me on the shoulder.

"*Viva el Americano!*" he cried enthusiastically. "Say, you are coming it strong, aren't you? Regular American. No humdrum backwoods life for yours, eh?—no pale-faced, black-eyed *novias*—eh, what?"

"Nix on them," I said. Slang was my pride.

"And I laughed scornfully. Soon after, we went our different ways. We didn't meet again for a couple of weeks. I had scarcely greeted Pedro before I eagerly plucked his sleeve.

III.

"EDNA and I," I began, "we—I visited her at her house the other night, and—I—she loves me, Pedro."

"O-ho!" Pedro whistled. Then he wrung my hand. "Congratulations," he said. "Tell me all about it."

"So I described the call at length—the sweetness of my Edna; the amiability of her dad, who had a red nose; his extreme interest in the standing of the Ortegas—politically, socially—financially.

"What an honor for the family!" exclaimed the enraptured Pedro.

"Cousin," I exclaimed, "I've made up my mind. I am going to become an American citizen—and marry Edna."

"The deuce you say!" says Pedro.

"Yes," I went on. Followed more raptures! Full descriptions of the little

delicatessen supper of which my Edna and her family and I had partaken—of the selections which the graphophone had poured out into the little Brooklyn flat. There, however, my admiration ceased.

"How I detest American popular airs on a graphophone," I suddenly observed.

"What's that?" says Pedro.

"They're awful."

"Nonsense!"

"Why, they can't compare with Venezuelan waltzes."

"Those barbaric pieces of—"

"Oh, go on! Don't you remember that waltz Pepita plays?"

"Which?"

"I named it.

"Rotten!"

"It's beautiful, man."

"And at it we went, hot and heavy, until we parted, about half an hour later, pretty huffy with each other. Next day, Pedro wrote to me.

"Forget last night," said his letter. "I suppose you have communicated to your father the two great pieces of news. I, too, have written to Caracas. Meet me two weeks from Monday, and I'll blow you to theater and supper, in honor of your change of nationality, and of your new *novia*."

"I answered, agreeing to his plan. When the appointed time came I showed up. The Venezuelan mail had just arrived that afternoon, bringing to me letters from my mother and my father and Pepita. Reading them, I had seemed to breathe the air of Caracas; and, though calm enough externally, there was a storm inside me, compounded of obstinacy and something suspiciously akin to homesickness. Pedro looked at me sharply.

"Weakening?" he sneered.

"Nothing of the kind!"

"Good. Glad to hear it. Let's get busy with the celebration right away. I meant to take you to that new musical comedy, but there are no seats, so I compromised on "The Belle of the Sierra"—don't know what it is, but it's been running for months, so I guess it's good."

"The play dealt with the California of the Spanish days; it was put on by

a manager whose forte was projecting local color over the footlights. It reproduced the very look and sound and essence of Spanish-American life with such fidelity that tears gushed to my eyes and the hollow homesickness stabbed at my heart. Pedro was scoffing beside me.

"Just like it, isn't it?" he railed. "The big patios with their adobe pillars, and the girls in their mantillas patterning along to early mass, and the long-eared burros—Aye! How we boys used to slap at them with our switches as they trotted by! Yes, it's all there, even the curved red tiles and the sunshine and the laziness. Bah! Rotten!"

"I gulped at something in my throat, and wouldn't look at him.

"Throw in," he went on, "a few slouchy soldiers, and you have Venezuela! Yes—a few of them, and trams like hen-coops, slipping off the rails at every curve, and five-foot-one policemen with carbines on their shoulders, asleep at every corner; a damp smell of coffee as you go by the warehouses; beggars, green mountains, blue sky; black, black eyes—and you would have Caracas! Pooh! Look! Now they've got a carnival scene on. See the confetti fly; see the girls giggle and run and duck. Caracas, by Jove—every bit of it! Just as silly. Bah!"

"Bah!" I repeated, dashing away some tears. Soon after that, the curtain fell.

"On the way to Pedro's pet restaurant for supper, I was so solemn that my cousin kidded me steadily.

"Now," he exclaimed, seated at his special table, "let the revels continue. Farewell, once and for all, to Venezuela—welcome to your new country! We'll drink that in champagne."

"The waiter brought and poured it.

"No more Caracas!" cried Pedro, lifting his glass. "Here's to Fernando Ortega, American citizen—to Fernando Ortega, husband-to-be—"

"Hush!" I cried. I put my hand on Pedro's sleeve.

"The restaurant orchestra was feeling its way gingerly along the opening bars of—Pepita's waltz.

"What's that?" snaps Pedro, looking round. Glass raised, to where the

leader was bobbing at him complacently. "Oh, Heavens! If they haven't gone and got that thing all the way from Venezuela—to please me! Oh, the deuce! They mean well, I suppose; but of all the rot—"

"Shut up!"

"Pedro put down his glass and looked at me. But I didn't look at him.

"I didn't even see him. I saw nothing of the chattering supper crowd, of the scurrying waiters and bright lights of the restaurant. No—by Heaven, I didn't! I saw Caracas—only Caracas—nothing but Caracas—my home. I saw it plainly while that waltz was being played; I breathed its very air, saw its mountain walls and sunlit plazas; and when the musicians stopped, my head sank into my hands, and I sobbed aloud.

"Pedro, I'm going back."

"My cousin eyed me in silence.

"Next steamer, I suppose?" sarcastically.

"Yes!"

"He said no more. His disgust, I suppose, was too great. But what did I care?"

IV.

"WHEN the next steamer sailed from New York for La Guaira, Pedro Ortega was at the pier to see me off. He was quite cordial—in fact, seemed to have forgiven me for my backsliding; for, in embracing me the last time, just before the gangplank was drawn away, he said 'God bless you!' with real affection. But—but"—Fernando puffed meditatively—"I feel pretty sure that his opinion of me was low, very low." He took the cigar from his mouth.

"Well, that's the story of Fernando Ortega, New Yorker," he said. "What do you think of it?"

I looked him squarely in the eye.

"This," I told him, speaking very slowly: "that I consider your cousin, Pedro Ortega, one of the cleverest men in the world."

He returned my gaze, puzzled; didn't seem, for a while, to get anywhere near my meaning. Then, suddenly, his eyes flashed with wonder and dawning amusement.

"You—you don't—Pedro didn't—you don't mean to say that that rascal

Pedro—"Then came a hearty roar of laughter.

"Ah, Pedro!" he gasped between paroxysms. "Pedro es clever. Of course. Jess! I see it. Ees such a clever man, Pedro!"

Pepita's waltz ceased abruptly. The voice of Pepita sounded, asking to know what funny thing *el señor Americano* had said to make Fernando so suddenly

indulge in such boisterous volleys of laughter.

"Tell me," commanded Pepita, brightly outlined in the parlor doorway.

Fernando, tossing away his cigar, rose from his chair.

"Yes, my love," he said, "I'll tell you. 'It's a good story. Ah, Pedro, Pedro!'"

And we both went into the house.

THE MATCHMAKER.

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH.

A SHORT STORY.



LISTEN, Ephraim, maybe that's her coming now."

Ephraim Bloom, an undersized, middle-aged man, with an air of meekness—due less to

his insufficient inches than to long matrimonial repression—put his head on one side to listen.

"There's steps coming this way," he agreed.

"And one pair of feet aren't making all that noise." Mrs. Bloom rose hastily from her chair and closed the door which led into the hall. There was such aggressive importance in her manner that Mr. Bloom felt constrained to inquire:

"What are you doing that for?"

"If she's got somebody with her, she'll want to ask him in. And if he's shy and backward, like all the young men nowadays, it'll make him uncomfortable to walk by this door and know we are gaping at him and sizing him up. Even Christian was in two minds about going on, you know, when he saw the lions in the way."

Ephraim Bloom did not seem to relish the comparison. "Well, I swan!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I wouldn't think much of a young feller that would balk at the sight of two such old tabby lions as you and I be."

"Men are what they are," replied Mrs. Bloom, in the tone of one who with a

different audience might have said more; "and the Lord who made 'em knows why He left so much out of 'em. But if Millie ever gets a husband, we'll have to make up our minds to take 'em as they come."

The front door opened and closed. Footsteps sounded in the hall, and a rosy-cheeked, full-chested girl entered the room. At the sight of her, the father's face took on an expression of pride, which had in it all the assertiveness of which his subdued individuality was still capable. But the face of the mother fell.

"I thought there was somebody with you as you came along just now," she said sharply.

Amanda Andrews walked home with me."

"Amanda Andrews! Warn't there any young men at that church soeiable?"

"I guess there was plenty of them," Millie replied tranquilly. "I wasn't noticing much."

"Well, things have come to a pretty pass when the girls walk off one way and the young men another. When I was a girl," exclaimed Mrs. Bloom, looking at her husband, as if challenging him to dispute her, "sometimes as many as half a dozen would ask to see me home! Once Frank Pepper and Joel Pease settled it by fighting, out back of the horse-sheds. Frank licked; but his nose bled

so all the way home that he couldn't scarcely say a word, and it didn't do him much good."

Millie removed her hat without commenting on this proof of her mother's youthful fascinations. But her father, rushing to her defense with a zeal that lacked discretion, exclaimed:

"They was poor sticks, both of 'em, Frank and Joel."

"Maybe they was," said Mrs. Bloom; "but, anyway, I could have had 'em, if I'd wanted 'em. There never was any danger of my being an old maid!"

She waked Ephraim that night by her restless tossing.

"Haven't you been asleep yet, Ann?" he inquired, in tones divided between drowsiness and sympathy.

"I can't sleep for thinking of Millie. You haven't a mother's feelings, Ephraim, and you don't know how I worry about that girl."

"About Millie?" the father exclaimed. "Why, she's as hardy as a peony."

"She's seventeen years old. When I was her age I'd been engaged to Sid Bailey, to say nothing of giving the mitten to Harry Brown and old man Watkins. Millie's never had an offer. She's never had a beau, and the only man who ever seemed to have any drawing toward her is Peter Short."

"What?" Ephraim Bloom was no longer drowsy. "Peter Short's wife hasn't been dead six weeks! If you mean to tell me he's been making up to my girl already—"

"For goodness' sake, lie down, Ephraim. The shivers run all up and down my spine when you rear up like a hay-cock and pull the bedclothes off me. I don't say that Peter Short has paid any attentions to Millie; but I do say that he had formed a good opinion of her long ago, while his wife was living. And now that Hannah is dead and buried, there's no manner of reason—"

Ephraim, who in obedience to his wife's behest had sunk back upon his pillow, again assumed an erect position.

"He's as old as I be," he burst out, "and a darn sight balder. He's had two wives, and the second one hasn't been dead six weeks. If Millie can't do better than that, I miss my guess."

"Do lie down, Ephraim. Millie

hasn't done better, has she? She hasn't done anything. She can't even get a beau home from a church sociable. Peter Short ain't the kind of son-in-law I should have picked out; but, if you can't do any better, I believe in making the best of what Heaven sends."

That the presence of Peter Short at dinner the following Sunday was not due to the leading of an overruling Providence, Ephraim could not have affirmed; but he suspected a human agency, and attacked the roast chicken in a manner suggesting unfathomed depths of cruelty in his mild nature.

Millie, who had been forewarned by her mother that she must be especially kind to Mr. Short in his affliction, looked sympathetically across the table at the flabby man with the band of crape on his coat-sleeve. She was not glad of Mr. Short's presence. His air of depression took away her appetite, though it helped her to realize his need of kindness.

But, with all her good intentions, Millie found it difficult to do more for the suffering widower than replenish his plate frequently. Mr. Short described in detail the circumstances of his recent helpmate's decease, and when that subject was exhausted he went back to the death of the first Mrs. Short, fifteen years before. He ate with a heartiness unaffected by his grief, and sniffed frequently.

Beyond murmured expressions of sympathy or horror, as the case demanded, Millie had opportunity to say little. But the mother noted that the eyes of the afflicted Mr. Short rested often on the fresh young face, and she was satisfied.

II.

AFTER dinner, Ephraim settled himself in his favorite chair, spread his handkerchief over the top of his head, and fell into the Sunday nap, which nothing less disturbing than an earthquake was allowed to interrupt. Hardly had his regular breathing changed to a tranquil snore, when Millie, who had kept her eye on the clock, rose and put on her hat.

"I promised Amanda Andrews to take a walk with her," she explained in answer to her mother's look of remonstrance.

"I should think you'd have known better than to give such a promise, when we've got company," said Mrs. Bloom severely.

"I promised before I knew you were going to have any company." Millie gave her hand to Peter Short, and was glad to think that on her return the house would be free from his depressing presence. As for Mr. Short, he shook her hand with an air of one long convinced that life is a series of farewells.

The closing of the door on Millie left Mrs. Bloom mistress of the situation. "I suppose it's dreadful lonesome up to your place without Hannah," she said as an opening wedge.

Mr. Short sighed. "It's lonelier than all get out. I've got pictures of Hannah and my first companion, Minerva, in every room in the house; but even the life-sized ones don't make it seem social."

"It ain't good for man to be alone," declared Mrs. Bloom, with the triumphant sense that she had good authority on her side. "Some of these days you'll have to be getting a new helper."

Peter Short shook his bald head, with the air of one who has been over the ground before. "I'm done with matrimony, Mrs. Bloom. My feelings has stood all the laceration they're capable of. If it should please Heaven to take away a third companion, it would just about finish me. Besides," he added, though with less conviction, "I'm not as young as I was, and an old man getting married looks foolish."

"You're far from an old man, Mr. Short," Mrs. Bloom declared affably. "And with a young wife to chirk you up, you'd soon be as brisk as a boy."

"A young wife," repeated Peter Short, shaking his head again, "is like buying a package at one of them auctions, where you don't know what you're getting till you've got it. I'm too settled in my ways to keep step with a frivolous young wife."

"There's girls and girls," argued Mrs. Bloom. "Some of 'em are hoity-toity and foolish, and others—like my Millie—are as sensible in their teens as if they's seen fifty. When a young girl is of the serious kind, she gives her own grandmother lessons in behavior."

"Millie has always impressed me," said Peter Short with the deliberation of one who offers a tribute, "as a mighty level-headed girl." He fell into a fit of musing, and Mrs. Bloom turned away to conceal an expression of triumph.

In spite of a naturally generous disposition, Millie wished frequently in the months that followed that her mother was less demonstrative in her sympathy for the afflicted Peter Short. He came to their home with a frequency which the young girl found distasteful, little as she connected his visits with herself. She was willing to be sorry for Mr. Short while he kept at a distance, but his flabby presence and his constant references to depressing subjects produced a reaction which left her only sorry for herself.

In justice to the twice widowed Mr. Short, it should be said that he was a reluctant suitor. Not only did his common sense whisper warnings against the suggested union of December and May, but, as a matter of fact, he fancied himself in the rôle of an inconsolable mourner. Beyond the fact that he had really cared for the departed Hannah as much as he was capable of caring for any one, he found a certain luxury in grief. And he was shrewd enough to realize that whatever dignity attached to him in his bereavement would disappear when he became the husband of a rosy-checked girl of seventeen.

But Mrs. Bloom was inexorable. No angler ever played his fish with more skill and patience than she displayed in handling the resisting Peter. In a surprisingly brief time they had passed from generalities to personalities. And when Peter admitted that Millie would make a wife that any man could be proud of, he was made to feel that, after going so far, he could not in honor do less than propose immediately.

Yet even then he hung fire. "Of course, I see the point of what you say," he remarked dejectedly one afternoon, as he sat opposite Mrs. Bloom in the family sitting-room. "that it's kind of extravagant for one man to have a house all to himself, so to speak. For, of course, the darky who does my cooking doesn't count."

"And things go to rack and ruin with

no mistress to look after them," Mrs. Bloom interjected.

"I've thought a good deal over the point you mentioned the other day. If a man persists in living by himself, some woman's got to live by herself, whether she wants to or not. As you say, that doesn't seem hardly fair."

"No more it is," said Mrs. Bloom.

"If I've got to be married again," said Peter, gazing appealingly at the lady who seemed determined to be his mother-in-law. "I'd as soon marry Millie as anybody. But she's so young, it don't seem as if there was any need of haste."

Mrs. Bloom assumed a judicial expression. "I've got your welfare at heart, the same as if you was my son already, Mr. Short. And I can tell you that if you want Millie, you'll have to look sharp. I don't mean that she's interested in anybody—yet," she added hastily, as Peter looked at her with an inscrutable expression, "but Millie's a pretty girl—though I say it that shouldn't—and there's never any telling when she'll be snapped up. She's good-looking, and sensible and capable about the house, and there's plenty of young fellows that know it."

A door opened and shut quickly. Rapid footsteps sounded in the hall. Every sound was eloquent of youth's sweet, swift impetuosity. Peter Short sighed. He had passed so far beyond the time of slamming doors! He felt as if the orderly peace of his life were suddenly and rudely shaken.

"There she is now!" exclaimed Mrs. Bloom. "There couldn't be a better time to speak to her. I'll slip out and leave you two alone."

III.

MILLIE, bursting into the room, radiant and dewy-eyed, was a sight to inspire ardor in the most matter-of-fact lover; but Peter Short did not look at her.

"How do you do, Millie?" he said formally, in answer to her greeting. "If you'll kindly sit down, I would like a word with you."

The wandering Millie seated herself in the chair her mother had so lately vacated. Mr. Short sighed.

"Bereavement is a dreadful thing," he said.

"I guess it is," replied Millie, feeling herself on unfamiliar ground. "But all my dead relations died before I was born, so I can't miss them much."

"When a man has laid away two companions," said Mr. Short in sepulchral tones, "he feels he's stood his share. The loss of another would come near to being a fatal blow."

"I should think it would," Millie murmured.

"And, besides that," continued Mr. Short, realizing with a sense of discomfort that he was conducting his wooing rather along the lines of his recent arguments with Mrs. Bloom, "a man's heart ain't a pitcher that you can empty out and fill up again. After loving two women devotedly, there ain't as much affection as there might be to offer a third."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Millie, this time with greater emphasis.

"But for all that," continued Mr. Short, as if making a concession, "if a bachelor's a selfish creature, I suppose a widower is in much the same boat. While he's got a hand and a heart to offer to a woman, it is his business to do it. And so," said Peter Short, sighing deeply, "I should be glad to marry you, Millie, if you will accept of me as your husband."

"Me!" screamed Millie. She got to her feet with a suddenness that overturned her chair, and stared incredulously at the flabby man with the crape on his sleeve. To his annoyance, Peter found himself flinching under her gaze.

"Yes or no, Millie," he prompted her.

"Well—no, then!"

"What?" If Mr. Short's proposal had not been of the sort to flatter feminine vanity, his surprise was even less complimentary. "Do you mean it, Millie?" he gasped.

"Of course I mean it."

"But you—but I—why, Millie, you haven't anything against me, have you?" Unconsciously his tone had become pleading. "Why won't you marry me?"

"There's several reasons, but I guess one's enough. I'm going to marry Dick Andrews when he gets ahead a little, so that we can—"

Peter rose without a word. He stalked into the kitchen, where Mrs.

Bloom was peeling potatoes. Her face was flushed, her lips tremulous. It had cost her a tremendous struggle to seat herself where she could not hear the conversation in the next room. Now, as she looked up breathless into Peter's face, she met a look of most unloverlike blackness.

"A man whose feelings have undergone the lacerations that mine have," was his unexpected beginning, "has been through enough, without being made a tomfool of into the bargain. Why in tunket have you been keeping at me for the last six months to marry that girl of yours, when she's engaged already?"

The pan of potatoes was overturned on the floor, and Mrs. Bloom flew past him. "Millie," she shrieked, seizing her daughter by the shoulder, "are you really engaged? Who is it? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's Amanda Andrews's brother Dick. And I didn't tell you because I didn't know till now. It's just happened."

Millie threw herself into her mother's arms, sobbing with mingled excitement and joy; and Mrs. Bloom was still clasping her fast when they heard the scraping of the wheels of Peter Short's buggy, as he turned his white mare toward home.

"Well! Millie's fixed at last!" Mrs. Bloom said to her husband that night when they were alone. As nothing else had been discussed during the evening, her remark seemed superfluous, but she continued blithely: "Dick Andrews is a likely young fellow, and he's pretty sure to come in for a share of his Uncle Hiram's property. I'm glad, though, that Peter Short proposed to her. A woman ought always to have one extra

proposal to hold over her husband's head. The best man on earth would be hard to manage if he thought she couldn't get anybody but him."

Ephraim removed his boots in stolid silence. Then, suddenly, he looked up aghast, for his wife had sobbed aloud.

"What's the matter, Ann?" he asked, bewildered.

She turned on him with a tragic gesture. "The matter, Ephraim! Can't you see that we've lost our child? All her life we've been first with her, same as she's been with us. Now, that Andrews boy can do more with her by crooking his finger than we could if we went down on our knees."

"Then, I don't see why—"

"And this is just the beginning, Ephraim Bloom. Her husband's home will be her home. And when her children come, they and her husband will be enough to satisfy her. A woman's heart is only just so big. The time comes when fathers and mothers have got to be satisfied with cramped quarters. It don't make so much difference to the fathers; but the woman who has borne a child, and has worked and planned for nothing else during seventeen years—well—it's hard for her to take second place."

He moved toward her silently, pity struggling in his expression with incredulous amazement; and she turned upon him a face that seemed to have aged suddenly, wet with hopeless and agonizing tears.

"I don't suppose I'll close my eyes to-night, Ephraim," she said gently. "So if you want any rest, you'd better take the spare room."

FORGETFULNESS.

Is the night dark? The day is quick to dawn,
And once more lead you back to life and light;
Lo, even now are half the shades withdrawn—
Bright morn may win you to forget the night.

Is the day long? But mark the sun's decline
To westward; soon will evening shadows creep
Over the weary world, and Lethe's wine
May lull you to forgetfulness and sleep.

Eugene C. Dolson.

ON SINKING ISLAND.*

BY BERNICE STROHM RUTH.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DR. LAURENCE DEVRY, in search of health, maroons himself on an island. A bullet sings through the air, and Lolita, a handsome woman, appears and orders Devry to leave. When he refuses, she threatens to shoot him. Seeing argument is useless, he starts for the landing, and faints from the effects of the sun.

Lolita hastens to his aid, granting him permission to remain on the island, provided he never comes to the bungalow. Perrault, a Frenchman of rascally character, joins them, and Devry learns he is her husband.

Devry meets Lolita, who complains of lassitude. He offers to prescribe for her, but she refuses. That night Perrault, in a drunken frenzy, runs amuck in the house. Lolita flees to Devry's camp on the beach.

Devry goes back with her to the bungalow. She falls sick of yellow fever and is nursed by Devry and Nina, her servant. Perrault flees from the island, but returns with Lindon and Denslow, counterfeiters. All three purpose to establish a plant on the island; but steam away when they see the quarantine flag which Devry has raised. Perrault, returning to the bungalow, surprises Devry in the act of exploring his cellar-den for counterfeiting. Perrault locks Devry in the cellar. He escapes, goes to his camp for a revolver, and returns to the bungalow. He sees Perrault standing at the cellar window, locks the cellar door, boards up the window, and has Perrault a prisoner. Perrault frightens Nina into letting him out, leaves the island, and returns later with two accomplices.

Lolita recovers and Devry tells her of his love; he also calls her attention to some facts that prove to him the island is slowly, but unquestionably sinking. As Devry is on his way to Lolita, in fear that she may need protection from the hawk-nosed man, he is caught in a lariat, thrown by Denslow, who, with the aid of Perrault, carries him unconscious to the bungalow.

CHAPTER XVI.

A ROGUE AND A GENTLEMAN.



AT the precise moment that Devry, roused by the shot from his nap in the hammock, had gone forth on his tour of investigation, Lolita, behind locked doors, was pacing her own room at the height of one of her most furious moods. Back and forth she raged, back and forth, back and forth, working herself into a tempest of wrath, the high heels of her satin slippers kicking the rugs up spitefully as she walked, small brown hands clenched till the nails bit cruelly into the tender flesh of her palms.

She was magnificent in that savage mood of hers, as the mirror might have shown her, had not her anger against Devry been so great that she neither

knew nor cared how she looked. As regards Laurence Devry, she knew perfectly, now, where she stood, and precisely what the nature of the feeling she entertained for him was.

She hated him!—hated him!—*hated* him! She wished—yes—with the soft curves of her red lips giving way to cruel lines—she wished he was dead! No fate that could possibly overtake him was too terrible for such a man—a man who had flung an insult in her face, and refused to take it back! He was no gentleman, or he would have taken it back! If he had been a gentleman, he would never have talked of her so, never have accused her of trying to flirt with him, of decking herself to win his admiration!

As if she cared what impression she made upon him! As if he were the last man the world held, and she must needs set her cap to catch him! As if—and

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for August.

so on, growing angrier and lovelier every moment. As if one might not gratify their own vanity without incurring such hateful comments! As if—

Too angry to finish, she stamped her foot, and then kicked savagely out of her way the red blouse upon the floor. Such a common, ugly garb—one the Carib girl might have worn—and he had professed to admire her in that! His taste was questionable, to say the least. And those odious sandals—he had called them “cunning”—and the short gray skirt she had worn since the year 1.

She dragged one of the gilt chairs forward and seated herself, continuing her wrathful rumination. She knew Laurence Devry as well as she knew herself. He was out there in the dining-room now, laughing over her discomfiture, and waiting for her to put on the ridiculous dress his impossible tastes preferred, and meekly walk out to tell him that he had been right and she had been wrong—and so forth, and so on.

Let him wait. When he was through waiting he could begin over again, and wait some more! She was not going, that was all! And furthermore, she never intended to wear the yellow sandals and red blouse and short gray skirt again as long as she lived, and to the last day he remained on the island—and he could not leave too soon to please her! She would wear the creamy dress with the silver embroideries—wear it every day, until it became all tatters.

This dress had no sleeves, and was fashioned low in the neck—not at all fit to wear beneath the glare of the West Indian sun; but Lolita was so overwhelmingly angry that she never stopped to consider that. She put her elbows on her knees, dropped her face in her hands, shut her eyes, and cried.

When she realized what she was doing, she sprang angrily up and tried to laugh: but, somehow, that didn't seem to work very well. The laugh felt all twisted on her face, and something hurt horribly in her heart. She didn't know what it was, or what to do to relieve it, so she pushed the gilt chair away so hard that it fell over with a bang. She stretched herself out on the carpeted floor, laid her face on her arms, and cried and cried.

That helped the pressure about her heart a little, and quieted the turmoil in her mind. After another interval it was a very reasonable, if rather tear-stained, Lolita who sat up and pushed back the perfumed masses of tumbled black hair. She got to her feet, righted the overturned chair, and picked up the scorned red blouse. She stood for a moment with it in her hand, eyes downcast. Then she stooped and gathered up the gray skirt.

Such a change in the countenance of any one you never saw. The red lips were soft and sweet and kissable again; the fair forehead unfurrowed; and the big black eyes, with the tears still trembling on the long, lustrous lashes, were the eyes of some one who could ask your forgiveness in the humblest voice imaginable, if you gave her even half a chance.

What she meant to do with that red blouse and frayed gray skirt is beyond knowing. For just then Nina's shrill scream tore through the house, and Lolita unlocked the door to admit the terrified girl.

“What is it?” she asked impatiently. “Nina, what's wrong?”

“*Ay de mí!*” the girl howled. “It is that he has come back. He is here—in the house!”

“He? Whom do you mean?” Lolita asked.

“That man who came so often, and was in the cellar with *monsieur!*”

The hawk-nosed man! Lolita paled.

“Where, Nina? In the house, you say?”

“He is in the kitchen. *Señora*, what shall we do?”

“Where is Mr. Devry?”

Nina shook her head.

“That I do not know. He is not in the house. I called him, and that man told me to shut up.”

Lolita stepped to the dressing-table, took the pearl-trimmed revolver, and slipped the tiny weapon into her bosom. There, dead as Cleopatra's asp, it nestled against her flesh, every chamber of the small cylinder loaded.

Calmly enough outwardly, but with the pulse hammering in her throat, she passed through the doorway of her room into the hallway to the threshold of the

apartment where she had seen Devry last. The hawk-nosed man was there, and not even the high courage which she had summoned to her aid could keep her from shrinking a little when his glowering gaze fell on her soft, bare throat and arms.

"What are you doing here?" she cried sharply, her voice staccato with fear.

His answer was an insolent laugh and another devouring gaze.

"Why," he said with some amusement, "it's Lady High and Mighty, I declare! How do you find yourself, my dear?"

"Leave this house at once!" she commanded.

"Not so fast," he sneered. "Your airs don't go with me now. Come and give me a kiss, my beauty."

The terrified Nina had retreated into her mistress's room, and was in hiding beneath the bed. Lolita, who was so frightened that she would have liked to follow the Carib girl's example, involuntarily took a step backward.

"Shy?" laughed the man boisterously. "Sweet seventeen, and never been kissed!"

"Monster!" Lolita panted, and out came the little pearl-trimmed weapon. She was afraid of this man, and had unwittingly let him see it. There was no time for dalliance. "Come another step toward me," she warned, "and I'll kill you!"

The hawk-nosed man laughed.

"Look out, dearie. Don't let that thing go off. It might hurt the landscape."

Then he was in a grasp that nearly dislocated his shoulder, and Denslow's terrific blow sent him crashing to the floor. The king of counterfeiters looked from the prostrate man to the mistress of the bungalow, and removed his hat.

"Is—have you killed him?" she faltered fearfully.

He shook his head reassuringly.

"Knocked him senseless, that's all. He deserved it."

He smiled at her, but not in the way the hawk-nosed man had smiled; and, somehow, she was not afraid of him, though she had never seen him before, and had not the faintest idea what his mission on the island might be. Both

voice and look were respectful, and when he glanced at the exquisitely-modeled arms and neck it was delicately to withdraw his eyes.

"Who—who are you?" Lolita said unevenly, her breath still coming a trifle fast.

His strangely winning smile set her at ease even before he spoke.

"Whoever I am," he replied, "and whatever I may be, I never allow myself to forget that I am a gentleman. You have nothing to fear from me."

"Of course," she nodded, puzzled a little, "I knew that. But why are you here? Are"—she hesitated—"are you a—a counterfeiter?"

The spoken word had so ugly a sound that she flushed and begged his pardon in a stammering voice. He had reddened, too, and his head was bent slightly when he answered:

"My name is Denslow. They call me the king of counterfeiters."

"Oh!" she stammered again. "I—I am—so—sorry. You—you don't look like—that kind of man."

Denslow laughed oddly. "So your husband said."

"My husband?" she interrogated.

He nodded.

"M. Perrault. You are Mme. Perrault, are you not?"

"Yes," she hesitated, "but where—"

"Here I am, Lolita, my adored," Perrault's voice piped from the doorway.

Lolita's eyes rested on him coldly. She said nothing.

"Not glad to see me, eh?" he queried with a shrug. "Well, at least, let us have something to eat. Where is Nina?"

"It need not concern you," replied Lolita coldly. "I shall not call her. I will never allow her to cook for you again. You have no right beneath this roof, and you know it."

Perrault lifted his thin shoulders again.

"That may be as you say," he returned, his eyes wandering over her attire, lingering longest on the pearls about her throat, for he had never known she possessed them. "That may all be," he repeated, his voice growing ugly; "but what are you going to do about it? Here I am, and here I stay till it pleases me to leave. Mighty fine you are these days, I must say."

The man on the floor stirred, groaned, sat up, looking about in a bewildered way. Lolita, still clutching the little revolver, turned to Denslow.

"Where is Mr. Devry? Take me to him."

Her voice was shaking. Denslow saw that she was on the verge of collapse.

"Mr. Devry?" he repeated. "Oh, you mean Launcelot — er — the doctor-chap?"

Perrault laughed, but Denslow silenced him with a stern look.

"Come," he said to Lolita, and, gathering her skirts about her, she stepped past the grinning man still seated on the floor.

In the kitchen, dimly lighted by the lantern, Denslow paused.

"Have you a lantern?" he inquired. "This is mine, and I have use for it."

"Yes." She spoke eagerly. "There is one hanging in the cellarway. I will get it."

"Pardon me." He stepped before her, opened the door leading into the cellar, found the lantern, and lighted it. "You should have something about your shoulders," he said. "I'm afraid it will be chilly for you."

But she refused to go back to her room in search of a wrap, so he gave her the lantern.

"I'm going to tell you where this man is, on condition," he said.

"Yes?" she queried eagerly as he paused. "What is the condition?"

"That you keep him away from the house for three-quarters of an hour. Will you agree?"

"Yes," she answered promptly.

He smiled with a gleam of white teeth.

"I should hate to see him get hurt, since it is altogether unnecessary, so keep him away. You'll find him down on the beach where his tent was staked."

"Was staked?" she interrogated.

"Isn't it staked there yet?"

Denslow bit his lip and spoke hastily.

"You'll find him tied up down there. I tell you, so it won't shock you when you find him."

"Oh!" gasped Lolita, and her eyes blazed at him. He took a knife from his pocket.

"Take this with you. You'll need it

to cut the rope. He's fastened rather tightly, I'm afraid."

"You brutes!" she half sobbed.

Denslow, lifting elegant shoulders, led her to the door.

"Shall I accompany you part of the way?" he inquired.

"No," impatiently. "I'm not afraid. Stand aside, please."

She passed him with a rush, and was down the steps and out into the soft starlight, the lantern swinging in her hand as she took the path through the trees.

The dew had fallen, and her dainty white slippers were damp before she had taken a dozen steps, but she hurried along without thought of that, her revolver and the knife Denslow had given her tightly clutched in her shaking fingers. The night had never seemed so empty of human sounds, or so full of supernatural ones. The ceaseless lapping of the waves swelled to a crash in her strained hearing; the soft fall of ripened dates made her start uneasily. The cool, fragrant wind blowing through the tree-tops had a weird sound; a leaf fell like the touch of a cold hand against her cheek, and she all but screamed.

Then she reached the edge of the grove. A few steps farther, and the lantern's sickly light showed the devastation that had overtaken the camp on the beach. For this she had no more than a fleeting glance. Her eyes had gone past the heterogeneous litter Denslow had rescued from the fire and lighted upon Devry, lying where the counterfeiter's lariat had brought him to earth.

Once in a while, in these disappointing lives of ours, it happens that we get our wish. When Lolita's eyes fell on Devry, it flashed into her mind that she had got hers, the wicked wish made but a little while before—the wish that she might find him lying dead. She put the lantern down and knelt on the sand beside him, her teeth chattering so that she could not keep them still.

His face was pallid in the lantern's light, devoid of color save where an ugly red gash cut slantwise across his forehead. She had her wish. He was dead; this man with the beautiful gray eyes and ever-ready smile was dead, and there was nothing for her to do but kiss

the lips that would never laugh at her again, and die there beside him.

The veil was no longer before her eyes, and she knew that she loved him—loved him—loved him as she had never thought to love any one as long as she should live. Passionate Spanish words came trembling to her lips, and she gathered Devry's head into her arms, close to her beating heart, and held it there, sobbing into his ear words of liquid sweetness.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOLITA CONFESSES.

"**L**OLITA," said a voice suddenly, and her sobs ceased.

He was alive, after all. The shock of the discovery was too much for her. The sobs redoubled.

"Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!" she choked. "I thought you were—" She could not finish.

"Don't cry like that," Devry entreated. "It's heavenly to have your arms round me," he added, "but couldn't you find some way of ridding me of this rope? Afterward—"

Her face was hot in the dim light, and the arms about his shoulders fell away.

"I—I forgot," she murmured confusedly, and was not angered in the least when she heard his answering laugh.

She loved his laugh, and should always love it henceforth, because she loved him, and the laugh was a part of him.

Just now, it was music to her ears, for she had never thought to hear it again.

"I'll set you free in just a moment," she said tremulously, "but first, you must promise me something. Will you?"

"Anything, Lolita," he replied. "You lead me round by a string."

She laughed unsteadily.

"I'm not certain that you will agree to this, but I can't loose you until you do, since I gave my promise to see that you did not—"

"Did not what?" he encouraged as she paused.

"Go up to the house for a little while," she finished.

"Yes," after a fleeting silence. "You gave that promise to whom?"

"Mr. Denslow?"

"Don't know him," Devry said.

"He—he's with Etienne and the hawk-nosed man back at the bungalow."

"Oh!" was the remark. "How did you come to make him such a promise?"

"I had no choice. He refused to tell me where you were unless I did."

The prisoner groaned. "My arms feel dead. That fellow roped me tighter than a Texas steer."

"You'll have to promise, Laurence," she said very softly. "Otherwise, I can't free you."

"I promise," he replied in his shortest voice.

It was an unwilling promise, but he did not want to stay tied up there much longer; and, besides, he could promise any one anything when he heard his name spoken like that.

Lolita opened a blade of Denslow's knife with considerable difficulty, then severed the rope that bound Devry's arms and ankles. That done, she threw the offending pieces of hemp as far as she could throw them, and went down to the water's edge to wet her handkerchief to wipe the blood from his face. When she returned she found that he had not moved.

"What is the matter?" she cried in a voice sharpened by anxiety. "Why don't you get up?"

"I will presently. Give me time. I've been lying here for the best part of an hour, and that rope was infernally tight."

"You poor darling!"

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?" asked Devry severely.

"No," she said defiantly. "I'm not."

"This has all been my fault," he quoted in mimicry of the tragic tone she had assumed that afternoon. "But for my weak display—"

"Be still," said Lolita crossly. "If you don't, I'll leave you here and go back to the house; and you can't follow, for you've given me your promise not to go there just yet."

"I'll be good," Devry agreed, and she dropped to her knees beside him again, and touched the gashed forehead gently with the wet handkerchief.

"Does it hurt you very much?" she asked sympathetically.

"Horribly," said Devry, who could be a most cheerful liar when cheerful lying served his purpose best.

"Poor boy!" was the pitying answer.

Devry laughed.

"Rather an old boy. I'm thirty-seven."

"That's young," said she serenely. "I'm going to sit right here, and you shall put your head in my lap until you feel better. . . . There. Is that more comfortable?"

"Couldn't be improved," said the sufferer, and stopped groaning long enough to add: "You'll ruin your dress."

"Bother the dress!" retorted she.

"It must have cost a neat sum."

"It did, but never mind."

A silence. She had folded the wet handkerchief and laid it across his gashed head. He was holding one of her hands; her other toyed with the string of pearls about her throat.

"Yours?" he asked.

"Yes," she said briefly. "My mother's."

"Pearls," Devry observed, "mean tears."

"Yes," in an abstracted voice. "And I had not shed one for four years—until you came."

"You've averaged a cry every day since then, haven't you?" he inquired.

She laughed oddly. "That would be exaggerating slightly. I think I've held your head long enough," she added. "Don't you feel like getting up now? I want to take a walk along the beach. It's cold sitting here."

Devry rose and lifted her to her feet.

"I'll put my coat on you."

"No, don't," she protested, but he was already buttoning the garment beneath her chin. She shivered a little, and looked at the blackened tent-pole, the charred fragments of canvas whipping in the breeze like the arms of some hideous scarecrow. "What was their object in burning the tent?"

"A ruse to get me down here, away from the house."

She shivered again, and stooped to regain her revolver.

"Take this, please. You may need it. The man Denslow has yours."

"So I supposed," Devry replied. "I had missed it. Whose is the knife?"

"Mr. Denslow's. He gave it to me to cut your rope with. You'd better take that, too. We may have an opportunity to return it to him."

They began their walk.

"It's lovely out here under the stars beside my sea," Lolita said, and added half beneath her breath, "with you."

"I heard that," replied Devry, greatly amused.

"I don't care," she said dreamily. "Why should I? I meant for you to hear it. Listen to the sea. I wish you could see it by moonlight, as I have—so still, and cool, and peaceful. Many a night I have walked here, all alone, and thought how peaceful it looked—how it would take one to its great heart and croon one into a sleep from which there could be no awakening. And, sometimes . . . the temptation to . . . to go to sleep . . . when I was very, very tired. . . ."

"Lolita!"

"It was . . . before . . . I saw you," she whispered.

"Promise me never to think of such things again," said he.

"I promise. I don't want to die—now. Life is sweeter than it was."

"That's confession," he said.

"I know. I suppose I'm growing hardened. I haven't been to confession for a long time, Father Laurence," with a laugh.

"Be careful," he warned.

"Why?" she asked merrily.

"I may make you confess to me, if you invest me with that rôle."

"Shall I begin?"

"Yes."

"Then"—her lovely head was bent and penitent hands crossed—"father, I have sinned. Absolve me. The happy, the favored of fortune, find it easy to be good. The miserable, the starved, hungering for something besides bread, trying to walk the narrow path, sometimes lose themselves by the way. There are conflicting voices, calls other than those of conscience. The fierce white light of duty dims, and we lose sight of it till darkness brings us to judgment."

Devry was laughing.

"You made it a little too real, Lolita."

I don't view the matter in your way. I believe in things ordained—mapped out. I think that ages ago, even before this world was planned and sent whirling into space, we were searching for each other in spirit. And I know the ether was crossed and recrossed with paths made by me in my hopeless quest for you, a goddess of the mists. The time was still afar. We had both to be born and walk a weary way before my steps could lead to your nameless island, and you with your rifle in your hand. Did I hear you yawn?"

"I'm afraid you did," was the frank reply. "I'm not educated up to proper appreciation of such flights of fancy. Besides, I'm very tired, and want to go back to the house. Do you think we might risk it now?"

"We will risk it. It's been more than an hour since you came down here."

He picked up the lantern, and they started toward the bungalow. Dew-drops sparkled on the patches of grass they were forced to traverse.

"Those slippers of yours will be ruined," Devry said.

"Never mind," said Lolita. "Laurence, am I superficial?"

"You were for about two minutes something over two hours ago," a smile in his voice.

She was silent.

"Doesn't that make you angry?" Devry questioned.

"No," said she. "Because, if I was silly, it was right for you to tell me of it, and I'm glad you did. Listen!" she said suddenly, laying her hand on his arm. "What's that?"

"It's the launch," Devry said.

"The launch?" she echoed.

"Yes. Those men came in one. It's the engine you hear. They are leaving. Can you run?"

"Yes, if these horrible heels don't turn."

"Give me your hand."

She gathered up her gleaming gown and they ran together through the trees. At the edge of the grove they paused. The bungalow's lights gleamed out to them across the intervening strip of sand, and beyond the dwelling, moving steadily northward, was another light that streamed like a yellow track across

the water—the dancing light of Denslow's lantern hanging at the bows of the launch.

The *pat! pat! pat!* grew fainter and died out altogether in a little while. Distance swallowed the dancing light. A leaf rustled down. Then silence again, the delicate orange-flower odor, and the pale glow of the stars.

"Gone," said Devry laconically, and they continued on their way.

Reaching the house, Devry, lantern in hand, descended into the cellar. As he expected, the door into the passageway stood wide. He stepped through it, and into the abandoned cellar.

The counterfeiters had done their work well. The molds and tools and the spurious coin was gone—not an iota of damaging evidence remained. In the dining-room overhead, he found Lolita looking at an empty glass and the smoldering stub of a cigarette.

"Do you suppose," she inquired, "that we have seen the last of them?"

"I sincerely trust so," was the fervent reply.

She meditated.

"I hope I've seen the last of Etienne and that hawk-nosed man, but I should like to see the one who calls himself Denslow, to-morrow."

"You would?" said Devry incredulously.

"That was what I said."

"Why?"

"Because he is not in a class with Etienne Perrault and the other man, and I wish I could tell him so."

"Turning reformer?" Devry scoffed.

"I might in his case, if opportunity offered," said she soberly as she arose. "I'll say good night. I'm very tired."

She took off his coat, laid it down, picked up her revolver which he had placed upon the table together with Denslow's knife, and started toward the door. Reaching it, she came back.

"I forgot. I mean to keep that knife until I meet him again."

Devry laughed.

"Do you think you'll meet him again?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Who knows? It is always the unexpected that happens. Good night, Mr. Devry."

"What is my name?" he inquired.

"Mr. Devry," she repeated, and, laughing, shut the door.

In her room she found the Carib girl still beneath the bed.

"Oh, Nina!" Lolita exclaimed. "Goodness! Have you been there all this time? Do come out!"

"*Señora*," Nina said shivering, "are they gone?"

"Those men? Yes, stupid. Come and brush my hair. I'm tired to death, and want to go to sleep."

Nina wriggled out from under the bed, sat down on the floor and loosened the strap of the slipper extended to her.

"Where is my bathing-suit?" Lolita asked.

"In the wardrobe, *señora*. You yourself hung it there."

"So I did," was her mistress's response. "It has been so long since I wore it that I quite forgot. Bring it out before you go to sleep. I'll take a dip when the morning arrives."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE PARTNER LESS.

IF the ruin on the beach had looked bad by night, it looked worse in the uncompromising light of day. That was what Lolita thought when, arrayed in her blue bathing-suit, she came down to enjoy her first plunge since her illness.

It was still early. The dew had not dried as she went with buoyant step along the path that led to the water's edge. Birds scolded at her from the branches of the tree that stood near the charred ridge-pole of the tent, and she jeered lightsomely back at them. The exciting events of the night before seemed unreal in the glare of the morning sunshine, vague, like something that had passed in a dream.

She found it difficult to believe that she had sat on the sand on this very spot, and held Devry's head in her lap. But she had done that very thing. There was no use arguing, or trying to convince herself that she had not. There stood the tent-pole, fringed with blackened fragments of canvas, indisputable evidence that the terrifying adventure had

been no dream. She wondered how she should meet Devry after all that had occurred, whether he would laugh at her when he saw her. Of course he would. Laughter was an essential to the man's well-being. He threw on it, as the lily or the rose thrive in the pleasant sunshine.

Let him laugh, Lolita reflected. She did not care especially about that, but she wished she could remember the precise words she had used to him the night before. The most tropical, as nearly as she could recall, was "darling." She reflected over this for a while, and then decided that he *was* a darling, though it was hardly necessary to tell him so. Fortunately, he knew very little Spanish, and her most impassioned speech had found expression in that language. She decided not to let it worry her too much.

It was a matchless morning, and matchless mornings were made to be happy in. And she was going to be happy from now on. She meant never to allow herself to be anything else. The one black spot on the island's beauty—Perrault—was gone. The captain of the commissary, which was overdue at the island, was her cousin, and she had gone in the ship many times to St. Vincent. She meant to travel in it that far again, and from there take passage to New York, then go northward by rail to the New England home of Aunt Georgia.

Later she would return to the island, for while her lease of the place lasted she could live nowhere else. The possibility of the island's ultimate fate, as suggested by Devry, she never considered, and nothing could have induced her to mark again the position of the bushes he had called her attention to some weeks earlier. It was sheer nonsense, anyway. The island had stood, surrounded by the Caribbean, for centuries. What reason was there for its sinking in a paltry few weeks?

So she went on planning, and in not one of her plans, as she perfected them, did she include Devry. She shut him resolutely out of them, and rose from the sand where she had been sitting, waded out through the shallows, and began swimming with strong, sure strokes. Her glorious black hair was unbound, streaming wetly over her shoulders.

She looked like a Naiad to the man at the wheel of the launch kicking its way in from the north quarter of the island. The man was Denslow. He brought his craft to a stand and sat watching her. A dozen yards away she waved her hand, and interpreting the signal as meant for him, he started the launch and came up with her.

"Were you signaling me?" he asked.

"You, of course," she said, looking up at him. "There isn't any one else in sight, is there?"

His hat was off.

"Can I be of service to you?"

"I want to come aboard," coolly. "May I?"

"Why—certainly," he stammered, in surprise. "Honored to have you."

He gave her his hand, and she came up over the side, dripping, and took the seat he pointed out.

"Sorry the parlor hasn't been dusted," he jauntily said. "It is the maid's afternoon out."

If he had expected her to smile at this plasantry, he was doomed to disappointment. She put the wet hair back from her eyes and looked at him intently.

"Last night," she slowly said. "I made a wish."

"Yes?" politely.

"It concerned you," Lolita added. "I said I wished I might see you to-day."

Denslow appeared greatly amused.

"You got your wish," he remarked, wondering whether she were trying to flirt with him, and dismissing the idea instantly. Her eyes and voice were too cool to be those of a coquette.

Lolita, the reformer, sat up very straight.

"Your name is Denslow, I think you said?" she observed, in a businesslike voice.

Denslow's head was bent a trifle, as it had been when he answered her questions the previous night.

"We will let it go at that," he quietly replied.

"Which is equivalent to saying," remarked Lolita, "that it isn't Denslow at all."

She looked at him sharply from beneath her straight black brows.

"Are those men still on the island?" she demanded.

Denslow answered in the affirmative.

"Would you mind stating just where?"

He smiled slightly. "Haven't the least idea."

"That's strange," said she.

"Is it?" Denslow shrugged. "It does not appear so to me, taking into consideration the fact that I'm through with them."

Lolita put back her hair, and looked at him with renewed interest.

"I'm so glad to hear that," she said.

"Are you?" Denslow half smiled, wondering whether this sprite-like creature, with the streaming hair and gipsy eyes, could be the regal woman who had confronted him last night arrayed in silk and pearls. He settled his hat over his eyes.

"When you do that," said the cool voice of the Naiad opposite, "it gives me the impression that you are ashamed to look the world in the face."

He started, colored violently, laughed, and sobered instantly.

"The world? What do I care for the world? What has it ever cared for me except to laugh at the miserable end of my brave beginning? It is rather from such eyes as yours that I hide my face."

His voice was bitter; bitter lines were about his finely chiseled mouth. The king of counterfeits had lost his *insouciance*. His head drooped as he stared hard at the shore half a mile away.

The launch lay like a painted bark on the scarcely stirred surface of the Caribbean; the gladdening sun beat down; gulls went screaming overhead, and still Denslow, at the wheel of the motionless launch, scowled at the palm-fringed shore. He was in a bad mood that morning, a mood that had preceded his quarrel with Perrault and the hawk-nosed man, and which refused to leave him now that he was done with them for good and all.

His association with the pair had been of brief duration, yet he felt that the shame of it would sting his soul forever. This without the spirit of the Pharisee, for, bad as he was, there were spots in his conscience not all dead. Law-breaker, fugitive from justice—yes. But he stopped at that. The others—he shivered still at the heinousness of the plot—

ting he had overheard. They had had the discretion not to ask his cooperation in an enterprise of that kind. He straightened himself and spoke to Lolita.

"I was heading for the bungalow when I saw you. I must see that doctor chap at once about a matter that concerns him chiefly. Will you go ashore in the launch, or do you prefer to swim?"

"The launch," she said, studying him.

They started shoreward slowly.

"You have a beautiful boat," Lolita remarked carelessly.

"I suppose so."

Denslow's tone was without enthusiasm.

"Don't you care for it?" she inquired keenly.

"I find myself caring less and less for things every day. That comes to us all, sooner or later. It will come to you."

"I don't believe it," was her assertion.

Denslow smiled a little.

"You are still very young. Under twenty-five—are you not?"

She nodded. He smiled again.

"Wait ten years."

Lolita regarded him coolly.

"If I could look ahead ten years, and see myself as out of love with life as you are, I would throw myself overboard here and now."

Denslow laughed.

"Don't mention such a thing, please; for if you did that the rôle of rescuer would fall to me, and I am afraid of alligators, whether you are or not. If I held the reins over you, you'd never swim in these waters."

She gave her shoulders a twitch, and looked at him again from beneath her tangle of black hair.

"A while ago," she observed, "you said you were through with the gang."

"Yes," he replied.

"Are you through with the game?"

He flushed, letting his eyes rest on the red roof of the bungalow showing through the trees.

"Sometimes I think I am. There's not much in it—never was."

"Why did you go into it?"

"I wish you could tell me why," he said bitterly. "I don't know. It's not much good-nursing grievances in this world, or trying to get even, but I tried

it. First there was an unjust charge for which I had to suffer. I stood that well enough, was ready to take up the broken ends of my life, make them meet as best I could, and go bravely on. What happened? Respectability turned its back on me. But that was not the worst. I could have borne the other; but when the girl—"

"Oh!" said Lolita, as he paused. "So there was a girl?"

He looked up, his eyes moist.

"I wish you could have seen her. She—"

Lolita shook her head.

"I shouldn't care to know her at all. She was probably one of the I—I-thank-thee-Heaven-that-I-am-not-as-others sort—a shallow creature, who—"

"Ah, but she was not!" Denslow eagerly interposed. "She was the sweetest, most long-suffering soul alive."

"But she turned her back on you, too?"

His head drooped again.

She did, but don't blame her too much. There were the others. They told her I was a precious scoundrel not worthy the saving, convinced her that I was on the way to the devil; so she stood aside and let me go. It was an easy slide after that."

Lolita was silent.

"It didn't seem," Denslow bitterly resumed, "as if there was much use to be honest and upright when there would be nothing but black marks against me, so I chucked the whole moral show. And that was where I made my mistake, for the girl—well, at any rate, she has not married, so it must be that she cares a little after all. If I had pegged along, taking the hard knocks, and doing the best I knew how until she found the courage to wriggle out from under the thumb of that old gorgon of a father of hers. Oh, well!"

He laughed.

"Do you feel better now?" Lolita smiled.

"Not much," he confessed. "But it's nice to have a chance to talk to you. You remind me of her in some ways. I'd like to ask you—have I the right to go back to her after this? Would it be worth living in mortal fear that some day she might discover the truth?"

"No," said Lolita decisively; "it would not. And you'll not offer yourself to her in that way. There's too much real manhood left in you. You'll tell her your story—tell it all, keeping nothing back; and if she's the woman you think she is, she'll love you the better for it, after the first hurt is over. Don't you think I'm right?"

"I know you are." Denslow returned huskily. "You're a game little woman, and the right sort. That's all I know about you, except that you've got a most valuable husband."

"Valuable to whom?" inquired Lolita coldly.

"Any one who can capture him and turn him over to the authorities." He sneered and added: "But not more valuable than I am if some one could capture me. You've been nice to me. Shall I, by way of acknowledgment, surrender myself your prisoner?"

"No, thank you," said Lolita, without a smile. "I should not care for that reward. . . . Besides, I'd like to hear some day that you had gone back to the girl, been forgiven, and were living the life you were destined for."

They had reached the landing.

"Come with me to the house," Lolita said, after Denslow had helped her over the side. "Mr. Devry is there, and you shall have some breakfast while you talk with him. It must be all of seven o'clock."

"Half past," Denslow replied, looking at his watch.

In the bungalow they found Devry, studying a calendar which hung upon the wall.

He turned at sound of Lolita's voice, looking over her head at the man standing just within the doorway.

"Mr. Devry," said Lolita, with a whimsical little laugh, "Mr. Denslow."

Devry smiled ironically.

"I believe we have met before," he politely replied, an answer which was followed by a second laugh from Lolita.

"Now, don't quarrel, or try to pay off old scores," she admonished them. "Sit down with the salt between you and discuss the weather or any other topic you choose. Only be peaceable." She turned to Devry. "I was taking my dip this morning when Mr. Denslow came along

in his launch. He said he wished to talk to you about a matter that concerned you chiefly, so I invited him to the bungalow. Please treat him especially nice, for he's going to reform."

She vanished through the doorway into the hall. The counterfeiter and the ex-surgeon of the United States army surveyed each other an instant.

"Sit down," said Devry curtly.

"Thank you." Denslow's tone was no less curt. "It is not my intention to stay longer than is required in order to tell you what Perrault and his comrade-in-arms, Lindon, are concocting. They mean to burn the bungalow to-night, and, incidentally, murder you when you try to save the building."

Devry looked at the other coolly.

"And you?" he asked.

Denslow spread out his hands.

"Let me out of anything like that. Besides, I've finished with Messrs. Perrault and Lindon. I'm on my way to St. Vincent, and I'll take you, Mme. Perrault, and the black girl with me, if you care to leave the island."

An instant's silence.

"Very neat, Mr. Denslow," Devry observed, with a frigid laugh. "*Very neat.*"

Denslow looked at him haughtily.

"You don't believe what I have been telling you?"

"Not for a moment," was the reply.

"Not a word of it. It's too thin for any one with eyes to fail to see through. You certainly did not think, because you could make a woman believe such a tale, that you could dupe me?"

Denslow's voice was low.

"I never tried to make her believe it. I did not mention the matter to her. She hadn't the faintest idea what I wished to see you about. I'm not surprised, however, nor as offended as I might be. I expected just such a reception, and know no reason why I should have expected any other. I've warned you. What happens from now on is your funeral."

"With you as head undertaker," Devry sneered. "Is there anything you care to add to this bit of fiction?"

Denslow controlled himself with difficulty.

"No."

"Then," flared Devry, "there is the door. Go out the way you came in."

"Keep your temper," Denslow laughed. "I'm going."

A moment later he was gone. Devry stood for an instant, listening to the retreating steps.

Then, seizing his hat, he left the bungalow by another door, and circled through the orange grove to a place on the beach where, under cover of the bushes, he watched Denslow put to sea in the launch. The king of counterfeiters passed within twelve yards of where Devry lay hidden, and the temptation to put a bullet into the fellow was strong.

Having seen the launch scud away, Devry returned to the house. Lolita was waiting in the breakfast-room, clad in the red blouse and gray skirt, her damp hair suggestive of her swim.

"Where is Mr. Denslow?" she asked, as Devry entered.

"Gone," was the crisp answer. "Joy go with him."

"Why didn't he stay to breakfast?"

Devry laughed.

"If you want my opinion, I suppose it was because he did not find it congenial enough."

"No doubt," replied Lolita, with a swift glance at him. "You look as cross as two sticks. What's wrong?"

Devry left the query unanswered.

"May we have breakfast?"

"Of course. Sit down, and I'll go hurry up Nina. She's probably fallen asleep over her cooking."

Lolita brought in the coffee herself, offering Devry his in silence. He watched her, irritation on his face.

"If I had known that you contemplated swimming alone this morning, I should certainly have forbidden it."

Lolita lifted her shoulders as she passed him the muffins.

"I have always been accustomed to swimming alone."

"Yes, but not when there were desperate characters about."

"Don't be too sure of that," she advised. "Etienne Perrault was on the island then."

Devry smiled unwillingly.

"Don't do it if you'd rather not," she said. "You look as if you wanted to swear. If it will relieve your feelings, don't mind me."

She ended with a laugh, in which he did not join.

Breakfast was a glum meal, and it was nearly at an end when Devry brought himself to tell Lolita what the object of Denslow's visit to the bungalow was. She heard it in silence. If alarmed, she gave no evidence, sipping her coffee as matter-of-factly as though, denizens of civilization, they had been discussing some happening blazoned across the first page of the morning paper.

However, the story, as Devry related it to her, differed slightly from Denslow's mode of telling. He omitted the part pertaining to the doing away with the troublesome presence of one Laurence Devry.

(To be concluded.)

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING.

We thank Thee that the sun and rains
Have brought the harvest to our fields,
That we have guerdon for our pains,
With health and hope that plenty yields.

We thank Thee for the touch of love
That has upheld us on our road,
Has pointed to far heights above,
And led to paths before untrod.

And, while we thank Thee for the past,
With bended knee and hymn of praise,
Grant differing hand clasp hand at last,
That peace, not discord, crown our days.

Cora A. Matson Dolson.

DEAD MEN'S CHESTS.

BY PHILIP S. HICHBORN.

A SHORT STORY.



IT'S something to have known San Francisco when it was worth knowing. Now it's no different than half a dozen other big places here in the States, neither better nor worse. Back in the days when it was a comparatively new place and trade was beginning to take advantage of her fine waters, it was a lively town, and there were more kinds of flags to be seen down the bay than you see now in New York Harbor.

It was a bad place, though, for a sailorman, with the gambling dens and Chinatown running wide open and at the same time the water-front rotten with crimps and other land-sharks. No, a sailorman did not have much chance, and so when they got all my money, which took them a surprisingly limited time, I decided to seek a good billet before they sandbagged me in the open street and shipped me before the mast on some short-handed bark.

I recall it very distinctly now, going down the quay one sunny morning, looking the vessels over and wondering which one I should have the pleasure of signing with. It was bound to be a pleasant trip, in any of them, the way things were run in those days with inhumanly cruel Yankee skippers and their clipper-ships, on the one hand, and the unpalatable food served out in the Britishers, or lime-juicers, as they were then called, on the other.

Made fast to the quay, half-way down on one side, I came upon a fair-sized ocean tramp, some fifteen hundred tons or more—the British merchant flag drooping from her stern. It was the only bit of color that enlivened the dreary scene, for, of course, she was painted black. Not only that, but she had pre-

viously brought in a cargo of soft coal and needed a washing down with the fire-hose, and a general overhauling.

What was worse, the deck was half covered with long, black boxes, which had been laid over from the quay, where there still was a pile for a hundred feet in any direction. The work of loading seemed to have stopped, and the tramp and the quay in that particular locality were as deserted as a Sunday morning during church.

I cast a look about and stepped aboard. I walked about her for'ard deck without seeing any one, then took a turn aft, and there, sitting in a kind of camp arm-chair, was a stout, gray-haired man, smoking his pipe. He was about sixty, I should judge, and I set him down immediately as the "old man."

I saw him watching me out of the tail of his eye, but he did not speak and kept on puffing, so I walked over to him and, touching my cap smartly, waited for him to ask me who I was.

That seemed to be about the last thing he cared to know, for he shifted his position to where he could get a better view of the harbor and kept on smoking complacently.

"Any vacancy, sir, for a good mate?" I said at last.

He turned then and surveyed me well and ran his hand through his gray whiskers before replying.

"Wot," he said in a surprised tone; "you want to ship on this vessel?"

"Yes, sir," I replied. "if the billet's open."

"Oh, it's open right enough, never fear. Wot have you done?"

I told him the various ships I had served in, and that seemed to satisfy him, for he nodded his head approvingly, then hesitated as if he had something more he

intended to say, but couldn't quite decide as to what.

"Look 'ere," he said abruptly. "It's none of my business and you know what you're doing, but you might as well know first as last, so you can hook it now instead of arter, when I'm counting on you and it's too late to fill your place."

"What do you mean?" I asked him, afraid he meant to back out.

"Well," he went on, "as I said, you may as well know first as last, and don't come around later sayin' I didn't tell you—but it's a Bible fact, that you're the only man in Frisco willing to ship on the steamship Nashurma. Captain Spinner, San Francisco to Hong-Kong."

I must admit that floored me, for the ship appeared as good as most of the tramps one sees here and there about the globe; and as for the captain, he didn't look as though only vinegar ran in his veins. He saw my look and took a long draw at his pipe.

"What's the trouble?" I asked when I had got my breath again.

"Corpses," he replied.

For a minute I don't think either of us spoke.

He had got out of his chair and was leaning on the ship's rail, his feet crossed, staring despondently across the bay.

Unconsciously I removed my hand from one of the long black boxes that seemed to hem us in on every side.

"Corpses?" I repeated vaguely. "Whose?"

He nodded and blew out a cloud of smoke. "Chinamen," he answered disinterestedly, "three thousand of 'em. I don't mind the job so much myself, not that I care much for Chinks, dead or alive, but I can't get a crew, and these wharf-rats won't load her. They work for an hour and then some one passes the word along and they're off."

After a pause, he told me all about it. It is a superstition among Chinamen that their souls never cease to wander until their bodies have been buried with all proper rites in the Flowery Kingdom. There existed an association, to which every Chinaman on the Pacific Coast belonged, that every so often boxed up the caskets in which the dead lay and shipped them home.

That, as far as it went, Captain Spin-

ner said, was all very correct, especially as the ship-owners got a fancy price for the transportation and Lloyds did not consider it a bad risk. The trouble came in getting a crew. While sailormen are not so awfully particular, they are of course notoriously superstitious, and, in spite of increased wages offered, as soon as the Nashurma's cargo became known, they bolted.

There were other things which gave them some reason for not wanting to ship, if the stories along the water-front were true, stripped of the exaggerations they had acquired in the telling. During the last five years three ships had steamed out with similar cargoes and never been reported again, which, to say the least, was more than mere coincidence.

For all that, we finally got the last of the boxes in the Nashurma's hold, and between decks, until there was hardly an inch anywhere in the ship to spare. We managed to get a short-handed crew, some who knew and some who didn't, and on the night of the 1st of August, 1882, cast off from the quay and began our long voyage.

There was a full moon and the sky was a network of stars. I have been in every corner of the world, but I can remember nothing half so beautiful as that night when, the captain and I keeping a sharp lookout ahead, the Nashurma steamed out through the Golden Gate, pouring from her twin funnels a long, black tail of curling smoke and leaving in her wake a scintillating churn of silvery water.

II.

WHEN I said we shipped a crew, that statement needs some qualifications. It *was*, and it *wasn't*. There were the captain—myself, first officer—Jim Bates, second officer; McIntosh, the captain's old engineer; five Chinamen, three of them shanghai'd from an opium den, and a negro. A pretty lot, to take a good-sized steamer, loaded to her scuppers, across six thousand miles of water.

We had steamed more than three-quarters of the way across the Pacific before anything unusual occurred. We had had fair weather with just enough wind to keep it from being sickening hot. McIntosh, a typical red-headed Scot,

such as you may find next an engine and wiping his hands with waste half the world over, had left the negro in charge and come up on deck for a breath of fresh air. We were running into the Japanese current and the temperature had gone jumping up to over eighty degrees.

Bates was at the helm and the captain below, so I stood talking to McIntosh at the top of the engine-room ladder. He mopped his face with the waste he clutched in one hand and went on smoking his grimy little stub of a pipe. He was silent, as many of his race, but there seemed to be something on his mind that made him more restless than usual. I noticed that the muscles of his eyes twitched. At last he took his pipe from between his teeth and spoke.

"Haven't ye noticed it more of late," he said suddenly, without preliminary.

"What?" I inquired, though I knew what he meant.

In fact every man Jack of us, Chinks, negro, and all, had noticed it and it was becoming insufferable.

"Mon, mon," he replied petulantly, "are ye no human?"

"You mean the—"

He nodded his head vigorously.

I knew what it was. Ever since I had seen that pile of boxes stretched ominously on the quay and the upper deck of the *Nashurma*, there had been something which I could not shake off—a sense of the unnatural so intangible that for a time I could not give it a name.

"You mean," I repeated, "the earthy smell and incense."

McIntosh stared out across the water meditatively; then, without a word, turned and went below, where I could hear him cursing the negro for letting the steam run low.

At six o'clock that evening I relieved Bates and took my trick at the wheel. We were not a very gay company, with one of us always at the helm and McIntosh in the engine-room with the negro, and the Chinks huddled for'ard gaping in a kind of frightened awe, or sleeping fitfully. Little by little the discovery of the nature of the burden we carried had worked upon their sensitive imaginations, and the dread of the supernatural lay upon them.

Bates did not leave immediately, but sat silently by, gazing at the limitless expanse of smooth water before us. He was not a bad sort of fellow, but new, and I doubt if he had ever held a place as officer before. I could see he was not at ease, and several times he started to speak; but finally, without a word, he opened the door to the pilot-house, stepped out on the bridge and went below.

The night was clear and still as death itself. There was hardly a sound except the rush of water past the ship's bows, for though the *Nashurma* was not much to brag of, she had a good pair of engines in her, and McIntosh kept them tuned up to about ten knots per hour. We were taking eight-hour turns, there being only three of us available, so I settled myself for the better part of the night and tried to enjoy the beauty of the moon on the water, for we were laying a course directly in its path, and to shake off an unreasonable feeling of lonesomeness. I had been on duty, I suppose, two hours, when the captain came up and joined me. I turned when I heard him. His face, in the moonlight, lost its deep, red tan and assumed a ghostly paleness.

"Mr. Clyde," he began abruptly, with an attempt at gruff indifference that caught my attention at once, "How many Chinks did we ship for the present voyage?"

For a moment I thought he was joking at my expense, referring to the quiet ones below us, but a quick glance at his face and his eyes, which would not meet mine, showed I was mistaken.

I answered: "Six, sir, and a negro."

"Quite right, Mr. Clyde—what I thought—six Chinks and a nigger."

He leaned over my shoulder for a second, looking at the binnacle, and I heard him murmur again, "Quite right, quite right. Six Chinks and a nigger."

He remained standing there a moment, undecided. Then he turned quickly and blazed with sudden wrath.

"By Heaven, I won't have it, and you can tell Mr. Bates that if 'e don't mind 'is dooties better, why, somethin'll 'appen to 'im before 'e reaches Hong-Kong, savvy?"

I turned in surprise. It was the first

I had heard of any dereliction of duty on Bates's part.

"I mean wot I say," he went on. "somethin'll 'appen to 'im if 'e lets them Chinamen go and come arft smoking their dirty opium, for all the world as though the 'eathen devils were the owners themselves."

"Chinks go and come aft—between decks?" I reiterated in dumfounded amazement.

Captain Spinner nodded his fat face vigorously. "Just wot I said. Mr. Clyde. Why, only this minute there was two of 'em squatting there on their haunches, smoking their dope and grinning. Outside my cabin, Mr. Clyde! Think o' it, Chinks smoking their vile stuff almost under my very nose.

"If I find 'em again I'll kill 'em. You tell Mr. Bates it's his dooty to keep the beasts for'ard, and 'e's got to do it, or I'll know the reason why."

I nodded. "I'll see to it, sir. It sha'n't occur again."

The captain, with some inarticulate retaliation, descended from the bridge and I heard his footsteps on the deck proceeding aft.

I couldn't quite understand it. It was unprecedented. In the old day a fo'c'sle Jack found aft would have been keel-hauled. I meant to give Mr. Bates a piece of my mind he wouldn't forget in a jiffy. I didn't intend to have such conditions on any vessel where I was first officer, tramp or no tramp.

Unconsciously my eyes considered the inert shapes curled up asleep on the for'ard deck below us. I counted them. There were six. Then I remembered there had always been six there, that I had noticed it from the moment I took over the wheel and I was sure none of them had moved since I came on duty. The thought occurred to me that it might have been the negro the "old man" saw, though it was difficult to make this theory fit in with his description of the Chinks smoking dope outside his door.

I picked up the tube and called to McIntosh. I heard his dry voice answer.

"Is the nigger down there with you?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Been there long?"

"Four or five hours, but you can have him for a' the guid he is."

I hung up the tube and studied my chart, trying to put the matter out of my mind. We were in latitude 10 north, longitude 180 east, the air calm ordinarily, with an occasional puff out of the north-northwest.

III.

LITTLE by little the stillness got on my nerves. I began thinking of the three thousand silent men down there below me, piled one on the other, and all the stories I had heard ashore about the other ships that had taken our kind of cargo over, or rather, tried to.

An A. B., picked up after one of the vessels had gone to pieces—all three had gone to pieces—said it had come as a great relief to every man on the ship when she sank. Those who hadn't had the strength to hold out to the last had jumped overboard days before. But they couldn't get him to tell what it was, or why the ship warped her seams and filled.

It was almost time for the captain to relieve me, and I was glad of it. I was worn out and nervous. I heard a step on the ladder, on the bridge, and then behind me in the pilot-house. I waited for him to speak and looked again at the chronometer. It was three o'clock and quite light.

I was conscious of a disagreeable odor, that of the Mongolian to the white, and I sniffed suspiciously as a horse does when it has suddenly become aware of the proximity of a wild animal.

Then I heard behind me a characteristic indrawing of breath, peculiar to Eastern nations, and I felt two cold hands laid over mine upon the wheel. I turned about sharply, and there was a gray, saffron-colored face grinning at me.

For a moment I glowered; then, as his face continued grinning, still so close to mine, I felt a kind of dizziness steal over me and I believe I came nearer fainting than I ever did before, or have since.

"What are you doing here?" I said faintly.

Then, encouraged by the sound of my voice, I roared, sailor fashion, at him, demanding where the captain was.

He did not answer, but went on grinning, his great yellow teeth looking more like a wolf's than a human being's, his long pigtail hanging down his back and trailing on my bridge.

I turned and ran down the ladder to seek the captain. The sea was clear and calm and the Chink could not do worse than let us drop off a few points to leeward.

McIntosh was standing as usual at the top of the engine-room ladder, smoking, his head just showing and his great, grease-stained arms crossed, elbows resting on the deck.

"Where's the captain?" I called to him.

He shook his head disinterestedly and went on smoking.

I ran past him and dodged down the after companionway. All was silence, and only the faint *click-clack, click-clack* from the engine-room told that we were moving or that there was life aboard the ship. A lamp swung smokily from overhead and made a disagreeable smell of burning oil.

"Captain," I called.

There was no answer. Again I called, but each time only the sound of my own voice returned to my ears. Suddenly a creepy sensation seemed to run over me, beginning with a tightening feeling of my scalp and ending with my knees, which trembled.

Opposite me, not more than ten feet away, just out of the reflection of the lamp, a pair of eyes were watching me. I could see them turn slowly with every movement that I made, never leaving me for a moment. It made me ill to think I had been there all that time with those eyes watching me, and not knowing it.

At last I pulled myself together and, with one hand shut firmly over the butt of my gun, I felt better. Strangely enough, weird as it all had been, no idea of anything supernatural had occurred to me, though nothing really spooky could ever look half as much so as those eyes did.

"Come out of there, or I'll shoot," I said in a low voice, and stepped forward.

Before I had time to draw my gun I heard a deep growl and something was on me with a spring. I shouted hoarsely as I fell backward with the fingers

around my throat. The gun went off in the air.

The next thing I can remember is struggling painfully to my hands and knees and then to my feet, leaning back against a stanchion and watching two shadowy forms struggling with a third, which fought like a madman and roared like a wounded bull.

It was McIntosh and Bates with the captain between them. At last they got him still and he stood, purple-faced and heaving. He looked first at McIntosh, then at Bates and me, and shivered.

"Where's 'e gone?" he gasped.

When he saw we did not speak, but only watched him, he cried out again:

"Where's 'e gone, d'y'e hear?"

My neck was aching from the wrenching he had given it, and I put my fingers to it gingerly.

"You tried to murder me," I said with some heat. "Have you gone mad?"

The captain's eyes rolled at me and I could see that they were the same that had stared at me so weirdly from the darkness.

"You!" he burst forth, lips afoam. "You! Why, it was *him*. 'E followed me down 'ere and I drove him up on deck and 'e come back again and tried to kill me."

The captain was working himself into a fit of madness. He was fairly screaming.

"You say there's six of 'em. I say there's three thousand of the evil, grinning 'eathen devils, and curse the eyes of the man who sent me out with such a cargo."

We looked at each other comprehendingly. The captain's eyes were rolling again and the perspiration was dripping from his face in little streams. Suddenly I remembered why I had come.

"And yet you sent that big Chink to take your trick at the wheel?" I asked him.

"Wot?" he cried. "I send a—yellow-faced 'eathen Chinee to do my turn!"

I nodded. "He's up on the bridge now. Go look if you don't believe it."

With a bound the captain flung himself out of the others' hands and was half-way up the ladder before we could stop him.

"Let me go," he whispered hoarsely. "It's him, the big one—let me go. I'll get him, man or ghost," and he drew an antiquated pistol from his pocket.

"We'll go together," said McIntosh, and Bates and I nodded.

IV.

We all went softly on deck and stood there looking for'ard. Then we walked on slowly and silently, the captain leading the way, McIntosh next, Bates and I following. It was bright daylight now, clear and warm. A few gulls had lit in the little rigging we carried, and kept up a noisy quarrel aloft. Otherwise there was not a sound except the occasional slap of the sea, which had begun to run in long swells against the ship's side, as we rose in mid air on one and then dropped ominously in the trough of another.

At last we were in sight of a portion of the bridge. We went more slowly until it swung in plain view before us. For an instant I was sure I saw the huge figure and the grinning face of the Chinaman, his cue trailing at his feet and the light air flapping his loose clothes about him.

Instantaneously he was gone, and only the wheel, swinging back and forth with each rise and fall of the ship, was silhouetted against the open sky.

The captain looked at the bridge, then at me, and shuddered. Bates was quite white, and sick from exertion and fear. McIntosh only shook his head, filled his pipe and smoked, his elbow supported by one hand. I ran up to the wheel-house and glanced at the binnacle. We had swung off five points to the south and were heading sou'east by south. There was a considerable sea running out of the northeast, which accounted for it, perhaps, and a little breeze had sprung up.

Curled in the bow on deck were a number of silent figures, one or two smoking their long pipes with the little bowls at the end. I pretended to have work near them. They watched me between half-closed eyelids, listlessly, indifferently. One of them spoke fair pidgin-English, and I meant to interrogate him in order to discover which of them had been on the bridge, when I suddenly realized that not one of the Chinks stretched on the

deck was one-half the height of the man who had taken my place at the wheel.

I turned, with a peculiar, baffled sensation, and joined the captain and the others. A moment later McIntosh disappeared down the engine-room companionway. Bates went aft to sit in his shirt-sleeves under the awning, and the captain, calmer to a degree, swung himself up to the Nashurma's bridge and, with a few sharp turns to the wheel, put her nose up into the wind and held her on her course.

That was the end of it. The captain stood at his trick the better part of the day, while Bates and I fell asleep aft, and McIntosh, listening to the song of his engines, smoked and cursed the negro.

At five o'clock in the afternoon I woke up with an uncomfortable feeling of suffocation. It was oppressively warm, and the air was so filled with moisture that, though asleep, it had put me in a disagreeable perspiration.

Bates moved in his sleep and groaned. The quiet was grave-like, and when you stop to think of it, we were nothing more than a moving burial-ground. The quieter it was the more that mysterious odor of earth and sickeningly sweet incense clung to us and permeated every corner of the ship. I sat up and stared about me. The sky spread azure blue above me, without a cloud, and the sun was sinking, a flaming ball, low and hot.

As I rose and yawned, a pleasant puff of fresh air cooled my rather feverish cheeks. Then another and another, followed by sounds of the flapping of the sail-cloth awning over our heads and the singing of the wind through the ropes aloft. From up for'ard came the melancholy chanting of some Chinese song; at least I supposed they considered it that, but to a white man's ears it was only a series of badly assimilated guttural sounds. As I stood there watching, an unaccountable nervousness took possession of me.

Bates opened his eyes, stretched himself, and inquired the time. At the same instant a sharp blow out of the nor'east picked up a ship's bucket and sent it banging noisily across the deck until it came up with a loud crash against the taffrail. Bates leaped to his feet and remained for a moment rubbing the sleep

from his eyes and staring out across the water.

To wind'ard one could see a tiny spiral of black cloud pointing into the sky. He glanced at me, drew a deep breath and shook his head, then went forward to relieve the captain.

In a jiffy he was back again, on the run, and shouting through his hands, for the wind was rising every second and was already blowing half a gale, for me to come. When I got there, he stood pointing up at the wheel-house, and there above us was the captain yelling something to us I couldn't hear, chattering like an orang-outang, and struggling with the wheel.

He threw it first hard apart and then to starboard again, though there was not sea enough running to warrant it. I was up the ladder to the bridge like a flash, with Bates, frightened but game, close behind me.

"Keep back!" I could hear the captain scream above the screeching of the wind, which had now increased to a gale. "Keep back, or he'll get you all!"

When I reached him he dropped into a maudlin singsong.

"'E was 'ere all day, 'e was 'ere all day, a holdin' o' the wheel," and with a sudden lurch of the ship he fell flat on his back and lay there staring stupidly, blinking his red eyes at the ceiling.

I grasped the spokes of the wheel and spun it to starboard. Instantly the ship steadied herself, and went plunging, head-on, into the big seas, that had begun to break over her port bow.

Bates pulled the captain to his feet but could not stop his singsong.

"I throws the 'elm to starboard," he chanted, "but his 'ands is stronger than mine. What ho, for the rotters below!"

With the help of two of the crew, Bates got him down to the deck, though he fought like a madman when the Chinamen tried to touch him. The glass was falling fast now, and I had no time to take our bearings. For aught I knew, the captain had been steering half the day in a circle.

We were in for something, any one could see, and it looked pretty bad at that. We were in the right place, just off the China coast, and it was the time of year for a big typhoon.

I yelled my orders to the terror-struck crew, and above the shrieking of the wind I could hear their occasional cries of "*pao fung, pao fung*," which, literally translated, means, fierce wind, but is used by the Chinese generally to signify one of their horrible typhoons.

It had been growing darker rapidly, though I had not noticed it until I suddenly realized I could not read the compass in front of me. Overhead, the sky was black and seemed to hang so suffocatingly low that it threatened every moment to envelop us. With a sudden furious blast it came.

It swept us, screeching, from stem to stern, smashing the ship's boats to kindling and bending the davits double.

For one doubtful instant we hung suspended on the crest of a great wave, and then rode it safely, the screw racing in mid air and shaking us until I thought her plates must part. I hung to the straining wheel with all my might, and waited for Bates to return when he had put the captain below.

After a little while he was back, and together we kept her head-on, though sometimes our bows would go out of sight and the seas would come roaring aft and overwhelm us at the wheel. We would come up gasping, fighting for our breath, and half drowned, only to go through the same thing again. We stood on in this way for a number of hours, the wind blowing out of the nor'east more fiercely every minute.

Bates and I were more dead than alive, when, above the deafening noise of wind and sea, I heard a voice speaking to me through the tube from the engine-room. I put the trumpet to my ear. It was McIntosh.

"The coal's running low," he rasped hoarsely.

His voice sounded weak and exhausted. I wouldn't believe him at first; but he made me soon enough. We had been using a tremendous lot of coal, being miles off our course a whole day; and then the storm coming on, McIntosh had been obliged to keep the fires at white heat in order to attain any speed at all. Besides, owners in those days almost kept count of the pieces, and you usually arrived in port with not enough fuel left to build a fire in the galley.

"Pile on anything," I shouted back to McIntosh in desperation. "You've got to keep the screw going, or we'll turn over like a top."

There was no answer, and I let the tube drop and hung on for my life. I felt the Nashurma sink her bow with a groan into the middle of a great sea.

V.

I THINK Bates and I had begun to feel we didn't much care whether she rode out the storm or not. We were suffering the tortures of the damned from sheer exhaustion. Our faces were lashed continually by the cruel salt spray that bit our flesh like a whip. At last there came something of a lull in the wind, though the seas were running as high as ever.

It was a characteristic sign. The wind would fall entirely from the nor-east, and a dead calm would follow for an hour or more perhaps. Then, without warning, it would suddenly come on to blow from the sou-west, harder than ever, if possible, with a driving rain to keep it company.

I heard McIntosh at the tube again. His voice sounded strange and far away.

"Weel," he said. "I didna let the fires out, me bonnie lad," and he cackled mirthlessly.

"Keep at them," I shouted. "Keep at them, and we'll ride it out yet."

The momentary lull had almost passed, and we went rolling, pitching on, when a moving figure on the deck caught my eye.

In an instant the wind came on with increased ferocity, with rain, and the figure was obliterated for that moment. Then I saw it lying, beaten and lifeless, in the scuppers.

Somehow Bates and I both recognized it for the captain, though it was a shapeless mass. Again there was an instant's cessation in the wind, and I knew I had a half a minute to get to him and bring him back. I did it, and reached the steps to the bridge just as a sea boomed the length of the deck and pinned the two of us against it. As soon as it had passed, Bates helping me, we dragged him up and lashed him in the wheel-house.

He was trying to talk, but could only gasp inarticulately, his frightened eyes speaking more plainly than anything he

might have said. At length he did speak, roaring through his hands into my ears.

"Good Heaven," he screamed. "I couldn't stand it down there. McIntosh, 'e's gone crazy. 'E's smashin' up the cargo with an ax. It's orful. I couldn't stand—" He broke off, and shook so violently that I thought he was going to have a fit.

An unusually strong blast choked us and left us fighting for our breath.

"'E's gone crazy, I tell you," the captain went on. "'E's smashin' up the cargo. Do you understand? The *cargo*—and pilin' it on the fires. The nigger's sittin' in a corner and laughin'. They're both mad—mad!"

Then the captain broke into his gruesome singing again:

"Oh, the cargo's shifted and the hold's alive.
What ho, for it's full of dead."

Bates turned and struck him in the mouth. There was no captain and subordinate now. We all three clung together as we saw the next sea coming, and, after hours, it seemed, came up half drowned, our eyes and nostrils and throats burning as if singed with red-hot irons.

I had caught the meaning of the captain's song. Suppose the cargo had shifted where McIntosh had been smashing and hauling it about, we would be in a bad way, for our only hope was to keep the Nashurma going and upon an even keel. I called through the trumpet to McIntosh. Holding it to my ear, I could hear his uncanny laughter.

"Shifted is it?" he repeated. "Shifted, o-ho! Shifted, o-ho! Come down and join the party. They're not half-bad fellows when you get to know them."

I could hear the sound of his ax and the splintering of wood.

But I had my answer. I could feel the slight list to starboard, and the Nashurma rose more laboriously each time; and the screw, more out of water, raced furiously and made us shiver from stem to stern. Then gradually I became aware of the dull shock and resultant tremor through the vessel as the cargo rushed first to one side and then the other.

It was only a question of time before some of her plates opened. Little by

little the wind seemed to grow less, and we could hear each other's voices on the bridge. Then, almost as suddenly as the storm had come upon us, it departed; a dead calm fell, the rain ceased, and the sky cleared in a magnificent array of early sunlight.

There was still a terrible sea running, the worst I ever saw, though it did not break and pour over us as it had for the last eight or ten hours. We rose to great heights, and then shot down into cavernous valleys of water which seemed to forbid hope; but somehow the Nashurma managed to come shuddering up, though each time I thought she never would. It was so still and clear that, when I put my ear to the engine-room tube, I could hear the steady, monotonous *clink-clank* of the engines, and McIntosh's raucous voice singing.

"Keep the engines going," I called to him; "it's our only hope."

I could not get him to come to the tube. He was muttering aloud to himself, while he punctuated his words with the ax:

"Wha's afraid of your wicked souls? Come, jump out: jump! And you need na stand there, crowdin' in the doorway, wi' your great grinning faces. I'm McIntosh, and I afraid of no mon, deid or alive: or soul, either, curse ye."

Then would come the fall of his ax and, a moment later, the roaring of the fires as, doors opened, he hurled on them the demolished boxes.

VI.

BUT Bates and I had something worse than crazy men and the captain's singing to contend with. The cargo had broken loose in real fact, and the list to starboard was dangerous. I left Bates in charge on the bridge, and ran to the foreward hatchway to find out how the crew had fared. The cargo had been piled everywhere in the ship, until there was hardly a square foot of free space or room for the men to hang their hammocks.

As I threw off the hatch, which had been battened down when the storm came on, some one sprang past me—a Chink—with such a face of fear as I never hope to see again. I turned to follow him with my eyes, but the next instant he had

flung himself headlong into the sea, and the waters had closed over him.

I stared down into the dark between decks. Gradually my eyes grew more accustomed to the dim light, and what I saw turned my stomach. The cargo had shifted indeed, and the dead had claimed the living. Death was everywhere. I sprang up on deck again and ran along the deck to amidships. I could hear the surging *bang, bang* of moving boxes in the waist of the vessel, but it was too late to help. I tried the ship's well. She had three feet of water in it. Her plates had sprung, and she was leaking somewhere. I called down into the engine-room—but McIntosh only jeered back at me.

"Get back," he cried. "Souls, are ye? McIntosh is afraid of no mon, deid or alive. Souls! o-ho; curse your grinnin' faces."

Upon the bridge the captain was singing again, and Bates was staring hopelessly ahead, trying to keep the wheel steady, though it was work for two men with that sea running.

When the captain saw me coming, he threw back his head and went on singing:

"Four ships sailed out o' Frisco Harbor,
Filled with dead below;
Four ships went down in a seething sea
To hell with the dead below."

Then he broke off and pointed forward with parched lips and bulging eyes. "There 'e is," he whispered, shrinking back. "Stand back! Stand back! You stood behind me on the bridge all day and drove us off our course, but we'll get you if you come up 'ere, no matter 'ow awful dead you are."

He cringed away, whimpering, his momentary courage gone.

Bates and I peered forward, but could see nothing.

"Stand back," the captain cried again faintly, and then we heard a sound which chilled us to the marrow.

There was a sudden shrill scream through the engine-room tube. I shall never know whether it was poor McIntosh in mortal agony, or the water as it reached the fires. Followed a frightful scorching sound, and a white steam-like vapor rushed from every opening in the

ship. The water had reached the fires. Another moment, and it would be at the boilers; and then—

We unlashed the captain and called for him to follow. McIntosh was no longer one of us. He had joined the cargo. The Nashurma was settling fast.

The captain fought us off and pointed at the thing he saw for'ard.

The sea had gone down considerably, and there was just a chance. Bates and I found a broken spar, cast it overboard, and sprang after it.

We could see the captain on the bridge, fighting back and forth in a death-struggle with an unseen foe, and could hear him blaspheming horribly.

Just for a flash I thought I saw the great body and grinning face I had seen that day at the wheel. Bates, too, started suddenly and pointed; but he never afterward would admit that he had seen anything unusual. In the calm, sultry air there was the ever-present smell of hot earth and incense. I wondered if it would follow me always.

We waited. Then it came. There was a smothered explosion that blew up her deck amidships and sent her funnels toppling. The bow rose into the air, and then swiftly, with a tremendous hissing sound, she sank—her gruesome cargo asleep at last in her hold, poor McIntosh no longer afraid or unafraid, and the captain fighting and cursing on the bridge.

We suffered a great many hardships, Bates and I, before we were finally picked up; yet I think neither of us would have exchanged that spar for the Nashurma's bridge just before she sank.

She was the fourth vessel with such a cargo to be lost within a little over five years; in almost the same spot, too. You couldn't get a crew nowadays for such a job, if you promised every man his ship. I don't talk about it often, because a good many people wouldn't believe it at all, or would try to explain it from a trivial standpoint.

Personally, I don't know what to call it—supernatural, or just the result of what nowadays they call psychological conditions, though that doesn't quite answer the questions: Why did the captain and I both see the huge, grinning Chinaman? Why did McIntosh, a hard-headed Scot, go mad and talk to dead souls, and all such rot? Why did four ships, with the same cargo, all from Frisco to Hong-Kong, go down in eighty fathoms, within a dozen miles of each other, after more than half the crew had gone crazy or jumped overboard?

No; "psychological conditions" hardly seems to be sufficient, but it's about as near as I have been able to get to the true explanation. Somehow I don't think any of us will ever know until at last we join the Nashurma's cargo and stand on that greater bridge, where there are no storms, and typhoons are unknown.

THE UNCOVERED MASTER.

BY EARLE C. JONES.

A SHORT STORY.



is called brave little Cupid; but in "Pilkins's Poetic Phrases"—the unpublished riming thesaurus of a man friend—he is chronicled:

Lord of the love lance,
God of the golden glance,
Deified darling of the dreaming dance.

Also, many things that are foolish and euphonious down the alphabetical line of rime from "ants" to "pants"—which latter word is skipped for the reason that Cupid doesn't wear 'em. Besides, as Pilkins once observed:

"Pan(t)sies are for thoughts, and no thinking person has aught to do with a violet-scented assassin who shoots your

heart full of darts, and then keeps you on pins and needles ever after."

Brave little Cupid, indeed! That is amusing! Brave, perhaps, in the presence of the bees, birds, brides, and butterflies that hover near his native heath on Mount Olympus—wherever that is; brave, maybe, before callow collegians, and even Boston girls. But I can prove, by the cowardly way in which he shot up good old Orlando Smith when the latter was ill, that the god of love is a sure-thing sport, who willingly plugs his prey when there is no chance of a come-back. And I, for one, would like to see Venus, his mother, get right down to bare facts and spank him on her own responsibility—or any place that hurts.

I doubt if it would do Smith any good, but it might teach the Cupid infant to keep off the grass when folks are sick and unable to defend themselves. But you don't yet know the depths of Dan's knavery in that affair.

Orlando Smith was just bursting forth upon the glorious dawn of his forty-sixth year—staid, single, and successful—when the grim specter of appendicitis, stalking abroad in search of eligible victims, laid a stringy hand upon him and said, "Tag! You're it!" before he could get his fingers crossed.

Thereupon he was advised, by the best medical authority, to go to Dr. Bell's Private Sanatorium, which is an institution where even the conversation is sterilized, and where they cut everything but the fees.

Orlando, however, preferred to undergo the operation in his own home; and, as he was the party of the first part, with abundant means to command, it came about that way, without the physicians ever knowing that this desire was born of a foxy and deep-laid plan to be where he could smoke cigars in bed during his convalescence.

Naturally, Orlando became much interested in the appendix, and, during the starvation period preceding the proposed operation, asked many questions pertaining to its causes, functions, and the whyforeness of its general worthlessness.

"Doc," said he, "if a man can get along without his appendix, what use is the blamed thing, anyway?"

"When it is inflamed," began the

grave old surgeon. "it is a bully thing to keep off life-insurance agents with."

After this reply, Orlando had willingly submitted to the ether.

Then, for many hours, his poor, dispossessed spirit fluttered about, presumably in the unknown astral, making pitiful but futile attempts to get back into its human flat before the "To Let" sign went up; but for a short time it seemed as if the spirit might have followed the appendix.

In fact, Orlando remained so long under the anesthetic that his nurse became alarmed and consulted the surgeons as to the wisdom of using some simple means of resuscitation.

"You might try ammonia," one replied, "but he'll come out of it, anyway."

The medical gentleman seemed very cool and confident. Possibly he thought that if gentle methods of resuscitation failed, he could show Orlando his bill as a last resort.

But finally, after many efforts, the dejected and ejected soul came back into its home and threw open the blinds. The patient's eyelids twitched, fluttered, and let in the light. Then, vaguely, through a misty, indefinable state of chaos, he saw a woman's sympathetic face close to his own, and felt a cool hand on his forehead, which soothed him considerably.

In a low voice she was saying: "Poor fellow! Poor boy! It will be all right!" And she repeated it over and over again, as she stroked his brow—as if he were a child.

Orlando's first definite impression was that he had finished his mortal days, and that he was in realms celestial. He deemed the woman a seraphim, and, through his filmy sight, he noted her golden crown and the nice way her wings were marcelled. Also, he deduced from the tender sympathy in her voice that things were going pretty tough for him at the throne.

Then, gradually, memory and consciousness dawned. The crown became a mass of dark-gold hair; the marcelled wings became white sleeves with thirteen tucks, and the seraphim changed into a very attractive woman, who smiled at Orlando over white, even teeth.

"Did they get it?" he feebly asked.

"Yes," she replied; for she knew to what he referred.

"Was it all that was expected of it?"

"I presume so," she answered, smiling again. "But it's best that you shouldn't talk now. Your nerves are shocked, and you must try to keep your mind absolutely at rest."

"Oh, but I feel sick!" And Orlando looked it.

"It's the ether," said she. "But you haven't a very high temperature."

She placed a small tubular thermometer in his mouth, and, as he held it, he watched her intently. She was a woman that had passed the spring of youth, and had merged well into midsummer; but there were no indications to show that her sun had crossed the meridian. Her countenance was fresh, wholesome, and unlined, and, like most wholesome people, she seemed to radiate her personality. But what Orlando most noted was her kindly, well-bred air and bearing that he designated as "class."

Some persons are naturally gifted for nursing, and of course *you* are one of that kind; but it requires qualifications that many people do not possess—the principal one being a naturally sympathetic heart and an unconscious desire to help bear the burdens of others. Of such a nature was the woman who sat beside Orlando's cot: and, possibly, it was this inner characteristic of love that lightened the touch of her thirty-two years. But of course Orlando did not think or even know about this as she withdrew the thermometer and made the entry in her report. He merely knew that she was good to look at, and that it was pleasant to have her there.

"May I ask your name?" he inquired.

"It is Helen Towne," she answered, and then added quickly: "Now, don't say the inevitable! They all do."

"Say what?" he asked.

Orlando seemed puzzled, and she smiled in amusement.

"People always ask what my name is in the country," said she, "when they hear it is Helen Towne. But I can't help my name, can I?"

"Certainly not," assented Orlando. And then he fell asleep.

Thereafter day followed day, as it in-

variably does, and time, in its ceaseless grind, brought us down to this morning.

II.

Now, as every one who lives here knows, this morning dawned dismal and dreary, with a cold, murky rain which began about 4 A.M. and brought with it a heavy fog, which necessitated the burning of light nearly all the morning. If you don't live here—which is to be deplored—make your own weather conditions, and you'll be as near right as the weather bureau's forecast was, anyway. Besides, it makes no great difference, so long as those morning lights burn for cheerful effects.

On this day Orlando has been told that he is well enough to sit up. So he arose at 9 A.M., stood dizzily for a moment, and then sat down.

Somehow, there seemed to be hinges in his knees. With a laborious effort, he got into his bath-robe, and Miss Towne helped him down the stairs to the library, where she served his breakfast. After which she retired, and Orlando sat in the big Morris chair, gazing gloomily out through the window at the rain and fog.

The bleak outlook should have accentuated the coziness within, but he was blue and depressed. He knew that his business was going to the dogs, for it did not seem possible that they could do without him at the office: and, besides, Orlando was one of those men who subconsciously hold the fallacy that the world will stop when they do.

He idly picked up a recent magazine and cut its pages; for it was one of that trying kind. His eyes settled upon a tale of cowboy life, by Amelia E. Boggs, the great Southern writer, and, as the illustrations pleased his fancy, he started to read it. It began:

Red Smith uncoiled the loop in his *arroyo*, and tied his cayuse to a *tortilla* bush. He knew that over at the Circle-Bar the boys were cooking supper, and Red thought of the strong tea, muffins, fried *mesa*, and *chaparral* steak they were about to enjoy.

"*Buenos días, cap'n!*" cried Saint Vitus Vickery, the station-agent, filling his pipe with cut *mesquite* plug.

"*Oh, como si arma frijoles,*" answered Red laconically.

But Orlando did not continue. He restrained a rabid desire to bite himself, and nibbled a pepsin tablet instead. He had detected Amelia E. Boggs in the act of passing counterfeit literature. He had bitten into her effort, hoping to find pure gold, but it left such a brassy taste in his mouth that he wanted to run for a chemical antidote.

Well, she might be a great Southern authoress, in spite of that; but her work sounded very much to the South Brooklyn.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured half audibly as Miss Towne entered the room to get the breakfast-tray.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Are you in pain?"

"Yes," he replied. "These tepid tales make me that way. There's a greaser about to be strung up with a *mescal* lariat."

She smiled good-humoredly, and made due mental allowance for his peevishness.

"If people wrote good stories," said she, "people wouldn't have to read such bad ones."

Orlando looked up as she spoke, and nodded. He wanted to remember that epigram. He thought it was impressive and equal to Napoleon's "Over the Alps lies Italy," or Dewey's "Fire when ready, Gridley."

"I suppose so," he assented. "I never thought of that. I used to blame the editors, but maybe we should feel sorry for them, instead. It's logical to assume that they would like to find writers with good strong heads and good strong tales. Maybe they can't."

"Perhaps not," she assented. "I used to try it myself, and felt that the editors were very unjust when my manuscripts came back. I reread some of them years later, and, honestly, they were awful."

"But there is a screw loose somewhere in the literary works," Orlando insisted. "There seems to be a dearth of originality. I seem to have all fiction so classified that I can tell what a story is about before I read it. I find a gem once in a while that surprises me; but not often."

III.

"Now, when I start a tale that leads off: 'Mignon sat in her little hall-bed-

room and looked at the dull-gray houses and glaring bill-boards,' I just naturally know that Mignon is a chorus-girl out of a job, who is due to star in the last column. So I do not have to read how Abie Woggleheimer, the manager, insulted her at first, and then gave her a five-year contract because she was pure, with pure ability. Anyway, some of the magazines are kind enough to tell the story in the pictures, and I usually buy that kind.

"Then, there's the sad story of Pegasus Piffl, who peddles his play, and is so discouraged he wants to go back to Steubenville, Ohio. I always hope he will—but, what's the use? Miss Whittington-Whiffles always butts in and shows Pegasus how he has Gus Thomas tied in knots. Then, of course, I expect to see Pegasus's play in electric lights on Broadway and page 363."

"Well, you do seem to have them classified," said Miss Towne.

"I have," he answered. "And after Pegasus, the plucky playwright, has bowed to repeated calls from his audience, and saved Steubenville, Ohio. I can look with equanimity at the poor little seals being killed in Alaska, the minarets of Mecca, Teddy in a new pose, pictures of newly arrived immigrants; and this brings me down to the advertisements, and Mary and John and little Myrtle in Slick-Weave Underwear, and I can always weave more imaginary romance out of Mary and John than I can get out of Boots Talkington."

"I pick up another periodical and look for my old friend, the 'Cumberland Mounting' story, which tells of stills, moonshine, and murder among the lowly. I can find this one easily. I look for the word 'rhododendron.' I do not know what a rhododendron is, but I imagine it bites. When I have found it, however, I know that I have treed a story of old Dixie, and that David Dawson, the hero, is going to be shot full of .44-caliber bullets, which gives little Mineola, the mountain maid, a chance to nurse him—much to the chagrin of Zeke Appleward, a former lover, who is leader of the feud."

"Being that I'm from South Norwalk, I naturally like Southern stories; but I do wish they wouldn't always begin: 'A blue-white mist was rising from

the valley, and the morning sun gilded the crest of Old Baldy, which loomed majestically over toward the gap. The trail led serpentlike through the pine, poplar, and masses of rhododendron—

"But I do not stay until they capture the rhododendron. I leave even before Barbara comes out upon the cool lawn in her cool lawn dress. I let Judge Branscome, her father, sip his mint-julep in peace on his broad veranda, so he'll be in good humor when David Dawson tries to buy his coal lands, and suddenly realizes that Barbara is the prettiest girl he ever saw.

"I know, however, that Barbara is a natural born loser, for I see by that frontispiece that Dave has a good sidehold on Mineola, the mountain maid, that would do credit to an octopus. Then I seem to see Mineola at Bryn Mawr, just eating culture, to be worthy of Dave, while pap stays home, eating hominy with a knife, and still saying, 'This hyar hawg,' and 'That air yearlin'."

"But there must be something new," interrupted Miss Towne.

"Of course there is," he replied. "Even I can remember when they didn't have wireless stories and tales of the buzzwagon. There is an overproduction of these, too.

"Also, I get tired of the Wall Street story, which can be summed up as follows: 'Maurice Morton sells the market short—loaded with so much stock you'd think he'd been eating tape. There is a shot in the private office, and a rift of smoke sifts through the transom, telling Mabel, his wife, that she is free to marry Steady Steve. Steady Steve has always been too noble to mention love in the vicinity of his affinity. They move to Paris on the insurance.' This should teach us not to sell the market short in a bull campaign.

"Oh, but best of all, I do enjoy the tale of the liner with the sweet, serious girl standing at the rail looking at the green wake, aft! Of course, most wakes are green; but I do not note it, for I am busy watching the girl's bosom rising and falling with the motion of the ship and the wind kissing her curls. I do not even see the tramp liner that lies off to starboard, which is due to hit her ship on the terrible night of July 3.

"I could love that girl myself, if I knew how to swim; but she's heavy in her water-soaked oilskins, and I could not swim to the island forty miles to leeward. No, I would be among the missing folk who helped eat the captain before the raft sank. So, Jack saves Dorothy, and it is he that draws the line in the sand over which he cannot step without knocking. According to the description, D. looks punk with the seaweed in her hair; but the illustrator makes her look good enough for my money.

"I like to watch her cooking the turtle soup, while Jack is swimming out to the wreck for her manicure set. He returns with a pick-ax, a case of rifles, six thousand rounds of ammunition, some canned corn, two trunks containing clothes, a tooth-brush, and several hairpins that the sharks did not eat. I opine that these articles will do until morning, for then the savages will come and drive them up among the cliffs, where the breadfruit groweth in great abundance. Of course, it comforts me to know that Dorothy is safe from the black devils, for I wot that she has saved the last bullet for herself; so I do not thrill.

"Besides, I am certain that even now Lieutenant Blake, of the U. S. S. Oklahoma, is in the offing, aiming the shot that will send the South Sea pirates scurrying to their war canoes, while Jack and Dorothy come down from the cliffs and go up among the six best sellers. No, I do not thrill. I try to keep my mind calm for the heavy work when I read the Dottie Dippy society story, which pours tea and repartee all over the page. This is their style:

"'Yes?' with a rising inflection.

"'Yes,' firmly.

"Héloise smiled archly.

"'Two lumps—or three?' she asked.

"'Speaking of sugar?'

"'Yes,' breathlessly.

"'Sugar has gone up two points.'

"'Which, granulated or soft A?'

"Those kind always look as if the writer was running out of ink; but they're twice as good, because there isn't much of them."

IV.

"I FEAR you are very hard to please," said Miss Towne, at the end of this long

speech. "But I'm sure there are some original ideas that you haven't heard of."

"I keep on hoping," he replied. "but I haven't met them yet. Some time the great *Poobahs* of American literature may uncover a new author that doesn't write according to Hoyle, but I doubt it."

"Maybe you are that man," she answered, half laughing. "I am sure that you could write well if you tried."

Orlando was glad to note her discernment was in perfect keeping with her general merits. He observed, too, that she looked very charming in her plain white gown, and that the lamp made pretty glossy pastel effects in her hair. He thought of how lonesome the big house would be when she was gone, and he wondered if she would think that his own age of forty-six was too old for romance.

There was nothing retiring or diffident about Orlando Smith, and he made up his mind that he would look into this matter before she left. Also, he resolved to knock a couple of years from his age when it came to the show-down.

"I am sure that you could write well," she repeated.

"Maybe I could," he answered complacently. "The universe is large, and there must be something undiscovered to write about. I'd like to read the weird and imaginative. Something about the fancies of the unknown—something odd and phantasmagorical about a gorge and rippling changes of color. I can almost see and feel it. There is a ghastly greenish light over everything, and I can hear the hum of moving worlds. Life and death are fighting, and there are myriads—slathers of them—swishing and swooshing up an endless ladder. There are vultures—and I seem to be in it, slinging glittering syntax and grammatical fireworks. I believe I could write it."

"Well, don't you think that Dante has that realm pretty well covered?" asked Miss Towne, smiling at his enthusiasm. "Besides, the best stories are not all of that imaginative kind. You don't need glittering syntax; that generally modifies your meaning. Why don't you take some incident in your own life and write about that?"

"I never had any," Orlando admitted.

"Have you never been in love?" she asked innocently. "I don't want to be personal, but most men of your age have."

Orlando flushed a trifle.

"Why, how old do you think I am?" he asked pointblank.

"About forty-one."

Oh, gentle goddess of truth, before you get out your celestial fountain pen to record that whopper, pause to consider that an innocent lie told to give pleasure is holier than a painful truth that does no good.

Of course, she knew his age was forty-six, for wasn't his watch engraved: "Presented to Orlando Smith, on his twenty-first birthday, by his father, eighteen hundred and something in the late sixties?" Hadn't she timed his pulse by it many times? Yes, she knew it, and her conscience did not hurt one bit when she saw his half-repressed look of pleasure.

"Well, forty-two, to be exact," he replied. "But, as I was saying, there's lots of literature—scads of it."

She knew that he was trying to change the subject, and, being a person of tact, helped him.

"Indeed, yes," she affirmed, "and I'm sure you could help raise the standard of quality if you would try. Won't you try to do it?"

She went to his writing-desk.

"Here is plenty of paper and a new pencil," she continued. "Now, let us see if we can't uncover the great unknown author."

"Do you think I'm well enough?" Orlando demurred.

"Oh, yes!" she answered. "It will serve to pass the time while I am gone, and it won't hurt you a bit."

She paused in the doorway and looked back. He was sharpening his pencil to a needle-like sharpness. When she returned, an hour later, he was still sharpening it.

"How is the story coming?" she asked. "Are you writing?"

"No," he replied. "I'm whittling."

She laughed and withdrew, thinking that his fire of genius might more readily burn if he were left alone. Three hours elapsed, and she brought in his lunch. The great uncovered author had his

tongue in his cheek, and there was a black smudge on his face; but he had accomplished nearly six whole lines.

"How is the muse working?" she asked, setting the tray down.

Orlando half started, as if he were very much preoccupied.

"I can't quite get the start of it yet," he replied. "I thought I'd write of a clambake I once attended, and how we were nearly swamped in the boat coming back; but I haven't struck my gait yet."

She glanced over his shoulder at what he had written:

An opaque swirl of riven rain beat down upon the Mary G. Henderson's deck. Sickly yellow lightning played about her gunwale, and it seemed as if Neptune was claiming for his own the stanch little craft, which was a full-rigged pleasure schooner, belonging to Colby Bros., of Sea Gate, who charged five dollars per hour for same, and threw in the cook. . . .

She tried to repress a smile, but couldn't. The smile spread into a merry, rippling laugh, in which Orlando good-humoredly joined. He even took her hand as a precautionary measure against her having hysterics.

"I am afraid you are trying to do too much," said she. "Just write naturally, and it will come—but 'riven rain' doesn't sound like you."

He released her hand, and again took the pencil.

"I'll try once more," said he. "Or, better still, we'll collaborate. I'll take a new plot, and have my part done by the time you have the tea poured."

And this time Orlando seemed to be making good. His pencil suddenly became animated like a thing of life. One page was quickly filled, and he started upon another. He even hummed an air as he wrote, and it seemed that the great uncovered had come into his own.

"You said for me to take it from my own life," he cried, "and that's what I'm doing. It's the best thing since 'Les Misérables,' and—oh, won't they fight for it! Draw up a chair, for I'm nearly ready. There," he continued, with a final flourish of the pencil, "I've finished!"

"My, but you did it quickly!" said she, taking the sheets in her hand.

A pretty color came into her face, which flushed like a rose, as she read to the end of the following remarkable masterpiece:

V.

LOVE IN THE INDIAN SUMMER;

or,

IS'N'T IT LONELY TO BE ALONE?

A Novel

by

You and Me.

CHAPTER I.

Smithy couldn't make his appendix behave, and met Helen.

CHAPTER II.

Doctors put Smithy's appendix in a glass bottle, labeled: "Wouldn't that jar you," and Smithy came to. Saw Helen for first time.

CHAPTER III.

Smithy loved Helen on sight. Devotedly—and then some.

CHAPTER IV.

Smithy realizes that his hair is traveling, but his heart is young, and all for Helen.

CHAPTER V.

Smithy wrote the following ode to Helen:

Your gentle soul is pure, sweetheart,
As dew upon the melon.
I miss the years we did not meet,
But they can all go Helen.

CHAPTER VI.

Smithy don't want Helen to go away. He wants her to stick here as his wife.

CHAPTER VII.

Eh, what?

CHAPTER VIII.

YES? NO?

NOTE.—Collaborator will please cross out word "yes" or "no" in last chapter. The remaining word will indicate the verdict. If the "no" is marked out, it will be the

finish of the book; if it's the "yes," it will be Smithy's.

VI.

SHE sat with the sheets in her hand for a time—a very long time, Orlando thought—and he felt very much as a man who is being weighed in the balance. Perhaps she was mentally weighing him; for she had reached the discreet age where women are supposed to have discernment concerning men. But, as she raised her eyes, he saw an amused light therein that bade him hope.

"How much of this absurd manuscript

am I to take seriously?" she asked, still blushing prettily.

"Every word of it—and more," he replied.

Then, deeming that the time of argument was past, Orlando arose, bent over her chair, and promptly kissed her.

A few moments later she raised her head from his shoulder and looked into his eyes.

"This isn't all in the book," she said. "You'll have to add an appendix to the story, and tell—"

"It's too late," said Orlando. "I've lost mine—but I've found you."

A DAUGHTER OF THE ARMADA.*

An Autobiography of Love and Adventure Truthfully Set Down by Rorie Maclean, Laird of Kilellan, in the Seventeenth Century, and Here Rewritten from the Original MS. into Clearer English.

BY STEPHEN CHALMERS.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOUR MEN AND ONE WOMAN.



TWO weeks had gone by, and yet Alexander Macmurtrie had not returned from Kilellan. The sobering influence of Blind Johnny's death had brought me to my senses. Before resolving upon any course of action touching my future, I decided to await the lawyer's home-coming, when I would thank him for his kindnesses and explain that I had taken the direction of my life into my own hands.

The death and burial of Blind Johnny was excuse enough during the first few days of my absence from the law offices. The funeral was touching in its simplicity. We carried the coffin shoulder high to the kirkyard—that is, some of the neighbors and—I did.

Blind Willie walked in the sixth man's place, with his left hand on the

coffin and his right groping ahead with the stick. The old man's fiddle, too valuable to be buried with its master, was laid on the coffin-top, and removed only after the body had been lowered into the grave. After all had departed but Blind Willie and me, the poor lad put the fiddle under his chin and played a sad little air over the fresh grave, much to the horror of the sexton. Then we went home.

Leaving the lad with his mother, I went to the Sign of the Thistle in search of Bordeaux. I wished to tell my friend of my proposed departure from Glasgow when Macmurtrie should come back. The landlord of the Thistle told me that he had gone out, and bade me be seated against his return. It was while I was sitting by the hearth, drinking ale and curiously watching a man who was breathing smoke from a long pipe—an amazing performance, I thought at the time, although I have since taken to the weed quite kindly—

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for June.

when the tavern-door opened and in stepped Ronald Macdonald, chieftain of the Kyles!

He saw me as soon as I saw him. His face flamed so fiercely that I waited to see his beard take fire, but he quickly recovered and advanced upon me with a calm but ferocious smile. I was unarmed, save for my staff. But I did not let the Macdonald think I was afraid. I kept my seat, wishing that I, too, had a pipe to breathe smoke from—to show the Macdonald what a spitfire I was.

"Hech, aye!" chuckled the chieftain, taking a stool opposite me. "It will be a braw day, Cam'ell."

"It will," I agreed; "but I'm thinking it will be a thaw before night-come."

"Aye!" he said savagely. "It will be in the air."

"Let us speak the Gaelic," I said in that tongue.

"Aye, aye," said he. "It will better express my opinion of you."

"And mine of you."

There was a pause. The man was taken aback by my apparent ease.

"Where is my wife?" he asked suddenly.

"I have not seen her of late, save in the company of the laird of Kilellan," I said significantly.

"Eh?" he gasped, turning pale. "You will be speaking of my wife."

"I will be speaking of Mistress Mari-posa."

His red face became pink, then took on a livid hue. His under lip shook, and he was seized with a fit of trembling. I felt a twinge of pity. Was it possible that this brute loved her in his way? Were these the symptoms of genuine heart-pain, or merely of sheer animal jealousy?

"Will she have jilted you?" he stammered.

"Aye, this week past," I said, not knowing whether I meant what I said.

"Then, by Heavens!" the Macdonald screamed, drawing his rapier in a fit of passion, "I will kill him. I will thrash his neck! I will tear his bowels from him! I will rip her thrapple with my teeth! I will—"

His eyes fell on me, and, in the fury of the moment, he slashed at me with the rapier, forgetting that it was not a

claymore. I parried the blow with my staff.

Then began the strangest battle the Thistle's walls had ever witnessed. So unused was the chieftain to the delicate weapon with which he had late adorned him that I had little difficulty in beating off the light blows which he showered in my direction. His thrusts, accidental at first, I parried; but as he awoke to his errors, I found it harder to defend myself, and was forced from one place to another.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw, as I fought, the man with the pipe draw his chair back and linger in his queer employ to watch us. The landlord hovered around with his hands in the air, appealing to us to have done. But the Macdonald's fury was in the ascendant, and I was too busily engaged to pay much heed to interference.

Up to now I had been defending myself with might and main, and hard work it was. Presently, when I was sure that my end was approaching, I grew desperate. Suddenly losing my temper, I flung strength into my staff and beat down the Macdonald's rapier with a mighty blow. Before he could recover, I had brought down my staff upon the chieftain's head with such force that it broke in the middle. I mean the staff, though I should not have been surprised if the Macdonald's head had split too.

He reeled about the room like a drunken man, then leaned heavily against a table and glowered stupidly at me. As I looked at the pallor of his face, it came back to me that my hands had once been at this man's throat and that I had spared him. The same fear of killing my fellow rushed back upon me. It was with a sense of relief that I saw him scratch his head and heard him mutter:

"Cam'ell, ye have a mighty arm."

"I have, Macdonald," I said: "but I would as lief employ it in better work."

I had meant only to express my dislike of such brutal work, but he took my words in insult. Dazed as he was, he again leveled his weapon and crept stealthily upon me, his parched lips peeled over his teeth. But at the first lunge the door of the tavern flung open

and a pair of arms encircled me and sent me flying across the room.

"Aroint thee!" cried Bordeaux, drawing his blade. "Ha! Merciless Macdonwald. Come! Let burnt sack be the issue. Fools! Flying at each other for a maid who will have none of you—nor even me, though I bent my knee and swore by all the gods, things base and vile, Love can transpose to form and dignity. A truce! A truce, I say! Strange as't may seem," he said as the Macdonald paused and lowered his weapon, "we are well met."

"Have ye found her?" cried the Macdonald.

"Aye, this very hour," said Bordeaux, "but— Pah! 'Stay me with flagons. Comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love.' Ho! good host. Bring the peace-pot."

Carried away by our lack of understanding, neither the Macdonald nor I were much surprised to find ourselves seated together in perfect amity and with Bordeaux pouring a strange tale into our ears.

"To-night," quoth Bordeaux, "I, who am despised—thou, who art jilted, and thou, who art husband—to say no more—or less—will be horned cattle 'less we stay this murtherous thing. She hath given her heart to the laird of Kilellan."

"Then, 'tis true?" said the Macdonald.

Bordeaux seemed a little taken aback. He glanced quickly at me, and there was a signal in his eyes.

"Aye," said he to the chieftain, "as friend Rorie may have said out of the bitter lees of his love: 'Tis true: 'tis true 'tis pity, and pity 'tis 'tis true.'"

"How ken ye 'this?" I put in sullenly.

"By the sensible and true avouch of mine own ears," said my friend glibly. Dropping his voice and his fantastic manner all at once, he said: "To-night the gay Mistress Mariposa attends with her lord the craftmen's ball. The chaise that shall await her will bear her—homeward? Aye, but farther—to Edinburgh! The witch had bewitched young Jamie, who hath bewitched her, and, lo! as the divine Spenser hath it—'lovely concord and most sacred peace.'"

"Aye?" said the Macdonald fiercely;

but I was too heart-sick to utter even a sound.

"By the elms beyond the Green do you await them, sword in hand and pistol primed. Fall to, and may the best man win."

"I will kill him!" roared the Macdonald.

"Nay," said I; "he is mine."

"Then he is to one of you," chuckled Bordeaux. "And the maid?"

"She is mine!" said the chieftain.

It was on my tongue to say, "So be it, and may you have joy of her," but the thought came to me that it was all a lie. It could not be true. Yet, had she not loved young Jamie but a year ago? Was not her weakness the love of finery and a name? Had the embers of that old love been famed aglow? Or was it the embers of my old jealousy?

Heaven knows I was a jealous fool; but the memory of young Jamie, and what I had suffered for her sake, and the thought of her smile as she lay in the arms of this drunken chieftain—all spoke of the fickle actress who could be as loyal to others in my absence as she was to me in my presence. Yet, it was hard to believe that the lass of the ban-nocks could be such a serpent.

I said nothing in protest against the chieftain's claim. But I would be there by the elms, trusting to Heaven and my manhood to acquit me in the right. If I could speak with her for a moment I would know, as I had always known, whether she was true or false. Yet, would her word cure this poison-bite, when the very cure was the poison itself? No, I would be by the elms at the appointed time, and if she came—with him—then I would know—

"I will be there, Macdonald," I said. "Heaven knows it is not in my heart to kill him, nor yet to begrudge you the killing; but I would first know if this thing be true."

I arose and walked to the tavern-door.

"I will be here at the Thistle," I said.

Over my shoulder, as I spoke, I saw a look, half of pity, half amusement, on the face of Bordeaux. It enraged me beyond all things that another should so see into my mind. I flung myself into the street and began to walk aim-

lessly, tortured by rage and love and jealousy.

I hated her. I loved her. I despised her. I worshiped her. And out of the tangle of emotions came a great gnawing, uncomprehending pain. I felt that young Jamie was more worthy of her, for so one feels of him who wins the love one coveted. No longer did I love Bordeaux. He was not my friend, but a sneering onlooker. The Macdonald I pitied, as I pitied myself, and I loved him almost with a feeling of kinship.

I remember giving two groats to the ferryman at the riverside, and recovering the dirk which I had once vowed to sink in her throat. I know not why I wished to have it now, save that having it, the white-heat of my heart slowly dulled into a hard coldness and indifference.

Hours later, when the bluish, wintry dusk was upon the town, I returned to my lodging. The 'Thorntons' sorrow seemed only a fitting part of the curse that had fallen upon me and all that surrounded me. I went to my little room, and there I found, lying on my bed, a sealed letter.

It was addressed to me in the straggly letters which Mariposa and I had learned out of the old Bible. The sight, succeeding the memory, stirred all my love again, and I came as near to tears as befits a man. It was some time before I dared break the seal and read the letter, for something told me that the whole of my life and love hung by it. This is what it contained, although written in Gaelic:

RORIE:

You have hurt me sore, and my love is as a stricken thing. How was I to know you had come from the house of death? How was I to know the lad who fiddled had a breaking heart? Would you blame me that I like to be admired in my new gowns—for this is what makes you angry. You would take all of me and you would have me perfect, when I am but a poor thing of vanity. When I wanted you I found you in anger, and my trouble I could not share with you, who should have helped me. But I have found a true friend who will help me.

MARIPOSA.

I flung the letter from me. And so, for the matter of a moment's anger—and I was willing to admit to myself

that I had done wrong in so speaking to her the night of the fiddler's death—but for this little thing, she had found another friend to help her in her trouble, whatever that was. Her trouble! What trouble could she have, save that of a persistent and welcome cavalier?

Yet I was not satisfied. There was that about the communication which was not of accusation, or of spite, or, saving the last sentence, of finality. It was more the reproach of a woman whose love could not scold. Oh, if only the appointed hour would come and I could find that Bordeaux had lied.

Perhaps he was the friend, not young Jamie, as I had naturally supposed. I knew that she had admired Bordeaux; and, as I was beginning to learn, it is the man of his type and tongue who is the forbidden apple among the daughters of Eve.

Bordeaux!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STRUGGLE BY THE ELMS.

IT was past eleven of the clock that night when I returned to the Sign of the Thistle. The Macdonald was there, restlessly pacing up and down. At the sight of me, he approached and whispered fiercely:

"For the hour, Cam'ell, y'are my friend in a common cause. But I ha' been thinking, and I warn you, sirrah, that you and I will settle our quarrel when the common foe is no more. Will you drink with me?"

"No," I said stolidly.

"As you will," he sneered; "but your bravery may need tickling, whatever."

"It may," I returned. "Seems to me yours is already tickled to the point of courage."

I sat down at the hearth and awaited his next move. But he continued walking, to the nervous distress of the host, who, I have no doubt, expected us to fly at each other's throat any moment. I fancied the Macdonald was awaiting some development, and in this I was right, for he cheered up readily when Bordeaux, aflame with excitement, entered upon us.

"Ha!" he said, drawing us together.

"All's well, friends. The post-boy is mine, and hath his instructions top o' the laird's. Away with you to the elms, and be surprised at nothing. Who will challenge him?" he asked, looking from me to the laird with ill-concealed amusement in his eyes.

"He's mine, I tell you!" said the laird, glaring at me.

"Good," chuckled Bordeaux. "Rorie, you will see fair play by your kinsman. Now, be off with you."

He himself accompanied us a part of the way. His manner was strange, and several times I caught him looking curiously—almost mockingly—at me. At the tron gate he left us, wishing "all honor to the best man."

Crossing the Green, my heart began to warm to the adventure, and for more reasons than one. I was tired of this plunging from the heaven of love to the torture of jealousy. She had played with me often enough, Heaven knows. Whether or no I had been deceived by her protestations and acts of seeming faith, the time was come when my doubts would be set at rest and my future ordered accordingly.

I fear now that my inclinations were to the wrong side, for I had already decided that she was false. The thought that she might not be in the chaise with young Jamie gave me a pang of disappointment. Her presence with him on the road to Edinburgh would be a surety of her intentions, while her possible absence would leave me in doubt as to what her intention had been.

But there was this consolation, that if the chaise came at all, young Jamie would not be in it if the object of his far travel was not with him, so that the coming of the vehicle itself presently became fraught with much importance.

It was dreary waiting under the bare elms that night. There had been a fresh fall of snow, followed by a biting frost. The cold was intense; and, while the Macdonald was well fortified by rage, I was chilled to the marrow with the air and heart-sickness.

The road across the Green was barely perceptible, save for the plowed lines of vehicle-wheels in the snow. At times we could hear the cries of the watch,

but no other sound came, save for the snapping of snow-laden, frozen twigs overhead, and the sough of the wind in the elms.

The midnight had not long passed when my heart leaped and stood still. A chaise had suddenly dashed out from the shadow of the tron gate. It had four horses to it, and I could see, by the motions of the rider, that they were traveling fast.

My hand closed firmly over the handle of my staff, my only weapon besides the dirk with which I had armed myself. I could hear the hard breathing of the Macdonald, and see the white vapor shooting from his nostrils ever harder as the chaise came on. He had a naked sword in his right hand.

"Do you leap for the leaders," he whispered, "while I drag the thief from the chaise."

Without caring much about the upshot, I prepared to do as he commanded. I was greatly surprised when the post-boy brought the leaders to a standstill in front of our hiding-place.

"Come on, *Macduff*!" shouted the post-boy, in whom I at once recognized that amazing fellow, Bordeaux.

"What means this?" cried the voice of young Jamie from the chaise. Then his voice dropped to a whisper, which said: "Patience, sweet. It is nothing." That was enough for me, but it incensed the Macdonald to great wrath. While I merely stepped out of the shadows, and prepared to watch the play with cynical indifference, the chieftain of the Kyles sprang to the door of the chaise. Before he could lay hands upon any one inside, young Jamie pushed him back and sprang to the snow, with his rapier bare in his right hand.

"Ho! A trick!" he cried. Then seeing his antagonist's face, he added with a note of astonishment: "The Macdonald! How is this?"

As they fell to with their blades, I heard Mariposa's cry from the chaise. It was a long-drawn wail of anguish. I could only distinguish the word: "Macdonald!"

"Quick, Rorie!" cried Bordeaux, who had never moved from the back of the leader. "Get into the chaise. She's yours."

I saw in a moment the trick he had played. In some manner he had supplanted the post-boy and now it was his intention that I should leave my two enemies in deadly combat and fly with Mistress Mariposa. But I had my own view of the plan and the lady at stake.

"Mine?" I laughed. "She's anybody's."

"Then, by Heavens!" shouted Bordeaux in sudden anger. "myself will take her for my pains."

He brought down the lash upon the off-leader. Before I could perceive his meaning, the chaise, with Mariposa in it, was a diminishing blot on the road to Edinburgh.

It was all like a hideous dream to me—a dream of snow, dazzling in whiteness against the somber elms, the dark figures of the drama, the sobs of the woman, the angry words of Bordeaux, the vanishing chaise, and my own idiotic laughter over the clashing of the combatants' swords.

But it ended with a cry of human agony. As the mist cleared from my brain I saw the Macdonald writhing in the snow with a dark blot spreading beside him. Young Jamie, blade in hand, was standing over him, muttering fiercely. He seemed quite unaware of my presence.

"That!" he roared, "for your interference. This! for the head of my father, Archibald." And with inhuman deliberateness, he slowly thrust his weapon into the Macdonald's breast.

"Don't!" I cried, all the horror of the act finding an echo in my voice. "For the good Heaven's sake—stop!"

Young Jamie, startled in his cowardly work, flung himself back, leaving the sword upright in the chieftain's body.

"James Campbell," I cried. "Is there to be any end to this, or will the Macdonalds avenge and the Campbells avenge until the judgment trumpet cries, 'Enough!' Oh, man, have the people not wept and bled enough for the crimes of your grandfather and the crimes of your father, that you should have done this? What if the Macdonald's grandfather slew your grandfather? What if this man cut the head from your father? Must his and yours cry blood! blood! blood! unto all eternity for the sins of

their cutthroat chieftains? Jamie, I did not love this man—"

"No, friend Sheepsblood," interrupted young Jamie in a sneering way, "and you would have slain him for the same petticoat as I have. Mark me, my preacher. I hated my grandfather. I hated my father as I hate a viper. I hate myself for the cursed blood that is in me. And you? I hate you for a milk-sucking yokel who would sit in my chair with a—"

I was at him before the word was full past his lips. He saw the movement and sprang to the rapier, which rose up like a cross over the dead Macdonald. I struck my cousin full in the face with my right hand. As he staggered back I wrenched the blade from the dead man and pitched it from me with all the force of my shoulder. Then I closed with my kinsman, each of us armed only with the weapons nature had given us, for I had no thought or memory of the dirk.

Down we went in the snow, locked in each other's arms. His fingers presently closed around my throat, while my left hand showered blows upon his face, until I could feel the hot blood trickling around my wrists. But still he held to my throat. I could feel his nails sinking into my thrapple. My temples seemed to be filling out and my skin burning and stretching over my cheekbones.

With a mighty wrench I freed myself and staggered to my feet. He was up as soon as I and with a shriek of maniacal rage he bore down upon me; his hands open and stretching out like talons, his face smeared with red and his whole aspect that of a maddened wild beast.

Half blinded as I was with suffocation, I was still ready for him. As he would have closed with me I struck out with my right arm. The blow, which split my own knuckles, caught him on the point of the chin. His teeth, which had been bared like a wolf's, clashed together. He spun around on his tangled legs and collapsed across the body of the man he had slain.

As he fell and lay still, such a silence fell upon the world which, a moment before had been clamorous with battle, that I fell into a state of stupid unbelief.

I left them lying there in the snow, weltering in each other's blood. I staggered away over the Glasgow Gate to the tron gate, my whole being filled with a new sensation. I was gay! I had slain mine enemy at last, and the savage blood of my people was tingling in my veins and reddening my sight with riotous triumph. I had forgotten the source of the enmity which had ended thus bloodily. Love was— Pah! War! War! was my creed. *Har! War!*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DAWN COMES.

I HAD taken little note of the passage of time, but it must have been after three of the morning when I threw myself, fully dressed, on my bed at Mistress Thornton's. Whatever time it was, I had hardly fallen into a restless sleep before I was aroused by a messenger from Alexander Macmurtrie, commanding my immediate presence in the house on Glasgow Green.

Not thinking or caring what the summons might mean—although I dimly supposed that the lawyer had returned from the Highlands and had news of importance to communicate, or wished to rate me for my behavior—I followed Macmurtrie's man into the street.

It was still dark, but as we passed through the tron gate the gray winter dawn began to spread in the east and light up the ghostly gables of the houses. The big lantern over Macmurtrie's door was swinging alight in the breeze and there were lights in some of the windows of the house. The lawyer's servants opened the door with a key and led me straight to the parlor.

There I found the little man in his nightshirt, sitting before the blazing hearth. He made an amusing picture with his fat toes spread pinkly against the fire, the toorie of his nightcap dangling over his nose, and a glass of steaming toddy within reach. As he saw me, he flung up his chin with a jerk that sent the tassel flying over his left ear. At a glance I knew that Rorie Maclean had trouble in store.

"Heeh, aye!" began the lawyer, surveying me fiercely. "Fine doin's, I'm

hearin'. Ye're as ba-arh'rous as ye're useless. But ye are not worthy of con-seederation at this meenit. The question afore the court is: where is Mistress Mariposa?"

If he asked me where the moon was I could not have been less ready to give a definite answer.

"Where is the lass?" thundered Macmurtrie, jumping to his feet, in sudden alarm at my silence. "Dinna stand there like the gawp ye are. Are ye deaf, or dour, or just stupid? Answer my question, or I'll clap ye an' the whole Gallic brood o' ye in the lockup. Where is she?"

"Mariposa?" was all I could say at first. Then, as remembrance struggled into my stupefied brain, I burst out in a way that astonished me no less than it did Macmurtrie. In a minute the story of the night was out—the killing of the Macdonald, the fight with young Jamie, the disappearance of the post-chaise, and—and—

"Good Heavens!" I cried, clutching my head in anger. "Bordeaux has tricked us all. He said he'd take her for himself—said I was a fool. I remember it now—I see it now—I—"

"A fool ye are!" snapped Macmurtrie, looking very pale. "Heaven preserve us! Is't as bad's a' that? Where's my—my—"

He darted out of the parlor in great agitation, but returned in a moment with the snuff-box in his hand and cramming the Broom Cannel into his excited nostrils.

"Now!" said he, snapping the lid of the box. "Let us look at this thing rightly. Tell me that story again."

I began at the point where I encountered the Macdonald in the Thistle Tavern, told him of the fight, of Bordeaux's interference and of Bordeaux's story of the proposed elopement of young Jamie and Mariposa.

"Stop a wee!" cried the lawyer, with his forefinger on his nose and one eye closed. "Who told ye that? Bordeaux? How did he know of it?"

"I know not," said I. "It must have been part of his trick."

"Mmmm!" hummed Macmurtrie, applying snuff.

"But what for would young Jamie

be in the chaise if it was a trick?" I protested, against my own reasoning.

"Mmmm!" came from the little lawyer, louder than before. I continued my story. Snap went the snuff-box lid and he interrupted with:

"Never mind the Macdonald. He's deid. If he's no, let's hope he's dyin'. It clears the situation. What did the lass say? What did Bordeaux say? What did you say?"

I told him as clearly as I could from a confused memory of it.

"Never mind young Jamie," said Macmurtrie sharply. "Let's hope he's deid, too. The less Hielan' trash in this the better. Hoot, toot!" he snorted, as I grew hot at the insinuation. "Hae some snuff."

He pushed me into a seat and began pacing up and down the room with his hands behind his back, his fat, bare feet paddling softly on the carpet, and the tassel of his nightcap whisking at every turn of the promenade.

At first he looked tremendously angry, then very puzzled, then he fell to chuckling and snuffing. Finally he stood up with his back to the fire, his hands behind him and the tassel dangling over his red nose.

"Rorie," said he, and I could not tell whether he was angry or not. "This is a very strange tale. For the murder of the Macdonald, I care not *that*!" snapping the snuff-box lid. "For what you may have done to young Jamie, I care less. Nothing could have happened better for you, but I feel sorry that I ever moved myself in your behalf. Ye have a la-amentable faculty for doin' the wrong thing at the wrong time, and if ye had had the brains of a—a— But, there! That's done. The thing is: Mariposa's run off wi' the best of the four, the man that saved her, and the only one that seemed to want her. If she has any sense—which I have nae doot she has—she'll marry him by the first meenister, and the mornin' we'll tak' aff our dram to Sir Ralph and—that is to say, to Mister and Mistress Bordeaux, for I have nae doot Mistress Macmurtrie will bar the door to them if they come unmarrit. As for you—"

He was interrupted by a sharp knock on the front door. I heard Macmurtrie's

man turn the lock. Then there were footsteps in the hall. I looked at the lawyer. His face was a marvel of many expressions, but his eyes were fixed steadily on the parlor door. It opened and Bordeaux entered, leading Mariposa by the hand.

Neither of them seemed much perturbed, at first. Mariposa looked at me and smiled mischievously, then she glanced at Alexander Macmurtrie. At once her face crimsoned and her eyes sought the carpet. At the same time, Bordeaux, who had opened his mouth to speak, stopped and chuckled.

"Are ye—as ye ought to be—marrit?" demanded the lawyer sternly.

"As you say yourself," said Bordeaux, "we ought to be, especially the lady, who, even if she were married, would feel commendable embarrassment on beholding a man of parts attired—"

"Guid forgie me!" howled Macmurtrie, suddenly remembering his night-shirt. He bolted from the room. And so, I was left alone with Mariposa and Bordeaux.

She looked at me with an earnest, inquiring gaze, which I confess I did not understand at the time. I answered, I suppose, with a look of sullen anger, or resentful reproach. All at once she tossed her chin in the air and marched out. Bordeaux chuckled.

"'I would have my love angry sometimes,'" quoth he, "'to sweeten off the rest of her behavior.'"

"It needs sweetening," I retorted, "but not by her anger."

"Rorie, 'twould be but sweets to the sweet. Farewell!" he added, with maddening mummery. "I hop'd thou shouldst have been my *Hamlet's* wife."

"Enough of it!" I cried, my blood boiling. "Ye dare come to me with your madness after—"

"I dare do all that does become a man," he interrupted sternly. "Listen to me, lad," he added, laying his hands on my shoulders, though I tried to shake them off. "Where love is great the littlest doubts are fears; but, ah! Rorie, 'tis a greater love that has neither doubts nor fears."

To my great astonishment, tears suddenly filled Bordeaux's eyes.

"I never saw a lass I loved so well,"

he said simply. "But where is the lass who, loving me to-day, could love me to-morrow? Thank the gods, Rorie, that you are not as I am. I love you, lad, and I will tell you, for that love, that I love the lass. It was never in my mind to take her from you." He laughed through his tears. "I find I could not; for when I spurred away—But you would hear all.

"She wanted you, lad. She was in trouble. The young laird importuned her every hour of the day. On the very night when you turned from her, he asked her to fly with him to Edinburgh. She said nay, but he would not listen. Fearing that he would carry out his plan whether she willed or no, she appealed to me—only, lad, because you were not there."

"Then you were the friend she spoke of," I said, filled with a sudden love toward Bordeaux.

"Most like, Rorie," he said. "It was not difficult to pay the post-boy and to fill him with jolly good ale and old. All went well until you spoke—"

"I understand," I said, dropping my eyes in shame.

"And I loved the lass," he almost stammered. "The fiend—the fiend—of Bordeaux—seized me. Ere I knew it, Rorie—I meant no evil—we were on the road to Edinburgh. When far enough, I dismounted and—I will not tell you, Rorie. You will not ask me?"

I looked into his eyes. I saw there the question he had asked Mariposa and her answer to it.

"No, I will not ask," I said. "neither you nor her." And I have kept that promise, though sometimes I have been very curious about what happened on the Edinburgh road.

"That's all, lad," said he briskly. "I turned the chaise, and—Here is your Mariposa, as true as my tale, as pure as my love. Give me your hand, lad."

We shook hands, long and firmly. Upon this silent seal of our mutual understanding came Macmurtrie, not wholly dressed, but respectably enough for our company. He paused a moment as he saw us in our silent compact, then he advanced with his hand outstretched.

"Sir Ralph," said he. "I wish—"

Bordeaux held up a warning finger

and said something about an onion by any name being a cause of much grief.

"Hoot toot!" said Macmurtrie, glancing quickly at me. "D'ye tak' snuff? A'm pairtial to the Broom Cannel massel'. Mebbe ye prefer the rappee. But, as Ah was sayin', I hae heard the upshot o't, and as parent in *locum tenens*, it is my preevilege and pleasure to offer ye thanks for—"

"Quite right! Quite right!" interrupted Bordeaux solemnly. "As Spenser hath it: 'Due praise, that is the spur of doing well.'"

"Aye, aye," said the lawyer pawkily. "but Spenser had nae beez'ness tae say it, he not being *locum tenens* in the case. Aye, aye!" he chuckled, looking at me. "A braw ending to her troubles, and a fine beginnin' o' yours, yer lairdship."

"My what?" I gasped.

"Hoot toot! D'ye tak' snuff? Na? Then awa' wi' ye—both o' ye—till Ah hae comb't ma hair, an' put on ma hose an' had ma parritch. Then ye'll come to ma offis by the tron gate, where Ah'm thinkin' there'll be a wheen o' beez'ness this day. Now, off wi' ye!"

And he bundled Bordeaux and me through the front door with so little ceremony that we did not know whether to laugh or be angry. But we decided to laugh.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COMING OF DON ALVAR.

BORDEAUX and I wandered about the streets for hours before we went to Macmurtrie's office. After the brief melancholy following upon his confession of love for Mariposa, my good friend became as merry as madcap as ever. As for me, I felt as if my heart had taken a new hold on life. A new love had come into it, or I should say that my love for Mariposa had undergone a change which is not as mysterious to me now as it was then.

I think that where a grown-up love springs out of an inseparable childhood, it is either a very satisfactory affection or a very disappointing one. A smooth love from childhood ends in the man—I cannot speak of the woman—becoming so used to having all of her, that there

is either nothing new to know or have, or he looks upon his discoveries as irritating developments in her character.

But, as in my case—and you have seen how many “irritating” faults I found in Mariposa—when a man has to fight at every step for what he has come to regard as his, and if his lady’s ways are ever teaching him that he knows nothing about her, then one day he may awake, as I did, to fall in love with her all over again, on the understanding that he must not only do his wooing like a stranger, but keep on wooing if he would keep the lass.

It has been a sore task for me to write these pages, for I realize that mainly I appear as a fool—and a jealous fool at that. I have read many books since then and I know that nobody likes a fool, and most people despise a jealous fool. But this is not a matter of likes or dislikes. It is just the truth I have set down, although Mariposa says she could not have loved me as much if I had been as bad as I have painted myself.

But, anyway, my life seemed different that morning, and, despite my swollen knuckles and aching head, I was happy and full of this new tenderness and respect for the lady called Mariposa.

I was full of curiosity, too, about Alexander Macmurtrie and his words. When Bordeaux and I, after a meal at the Sign of the Thistle, climbed the stairs to the lawyer’s office, we found Macmurtrie there before us. He had a pile of papers spread before him and wore an air of great importance. Sniffles was at his accustomed place and at his accustomed employ. The moment we were seated, the lawyer drew a long face and said:

“Will ye have heard that a man was found dead not a stone’s throw from my house this morning? No? Hoot toot! We live in a troublous time, and it is fair la-amentable the number that hae met their dooms by yon elms. None kenned him, puir man—excep’ masel’, maybe, an’ Ah wadnae mention his name for worlds. It’s la-amentable, la-amentable!”

Macmurtrie wiggled his fat nose viciously, gave a great snort, snapped the lid of the snuff-box, and said briskly:

“But Ah didna ask ye here to speak

of highway robberies and the like, but to ask if ye hae seen anything o’ young Jamie, who was by heritage Laird o’ Kilellan, of Cowal, in Argyll. Na? Neither have I, but I was thinkin’ that if he was to come here I might show him a bloody sword that would fit his empty sheath. That is to say, the Toon Craftsmen might, and they’re gey an’ eager to put a rope aroond the neck o’ yon varlet wha has pestered the king’s highway for a twal’month. He’d be mair useful danglin’ on the elms than sittin’ at the fit, wi’ a primed pistol an’ malice aforethought. But Ah hae nae doot, if he’s a sensible man, he’ll cross the border. There’s a braw outlook for rogues in the new India Company. A handy man wi’ a length o’ sword an’ a short conscience can mak’ a wheen o’ siller they days.

“Hech, aye!” sighed the lawyer. “But—d’ye tak’ snuff, sir—Bordeaux? Na? Weel, Rorie,” he added abruptly. “I hae seen Kilellan.”

I started. The lawyer was regarding me with his little shrewd eyes. I nodded my head.

“An’ it’s in a bonny mess. The coos are roostin’ in the castle ha’ an’ there’s no a thing worth the pickin’. If it was no for a fair bit o’ herrin’ noo au’ then, yer people would starve. Are ye no’ ashamed o’ yourself, sir?”

I could only stare at him.

“Aye, ye may sit dumb,” said Macmurtrie sternly. “Ye would not dare to answer. It was only four days gone by that I spoke to the earl himself. ‘What, sirrah!’ quo’ he. An’ I quite agreed wi’ him. It’s fair la-amentable. An’ it’s no for want o’ claimants. Here’s the auld laird’s grandson stravagin’ the country, playing highwayman maist like; and the auld laird’s nephew rantin’ after leddies an’ princesses in distress an’ the ilk; an’ the auld laird’s granddaughter bein’ carried off, like Mary, by Bothwells and Darnleys and— Hoot, toot! But ye’re a ba-arb’rous lot. I’m tellin’ ye.

“‘Where’s the younger James?’ says Argyll, an’ when Ah told him what a pack o’ plottin’, murtherin’ heathen ye were, he fair threw up his hands in disgust. And when I came to’t that James the younger was a blackguard and there

was none left but a heathen lass, the laird scratched his chin. She'd mak' a braw chieftain, but seein' she's no' half the size o' a claymore it's no verra practical. An' the earl was that way o' thinkin', too. Then I mentioned Rorie, who is by way o' bein' a grandnephew to Argyll on the Campbell side, and besides young Jamie and the lass, the hereditary Chieftain o' Kilellan. 'Could ye not marry them, Macmurtrie?' says the earl. But I told him that I feared Rorie would not marry the lass, for that she was a Papist.

"Now," chuckled Macmurtrie, "that was touchin' a tender spot in Argyll himself, for he and his fathers have been sword-dancin' atween the Pope and the crown for a hunder' years. 'Macmurtrie,' says he, an' I could see a twinkle in his e'e, 'it is my wish that ye marry them, for if he canna make a Christian o' her, she'll make a Papist o' him!'

"So there ye are, Rorie!" concluded the lawyer triumphantly. "Laird o' Kilellan, in Cowal, by the grace o' Argyll and the king's favor. An' yer people will be glad to see a sane man at the heid o' their sept. As for young Jamie and the Macdonald—leave that to Alexander Macmurtrie."

Before I could express myself fittingly, the door opened and Macmurtrie's man—the same who had brought me from bed that morning—handed the lawyer a paper. Macmurtrie glanced over its contents and leaped from his chair. He seized his bonnet and, flinging on his coat, made a dash for the door. Then he suddenly remembered us. Turning around he waved the paper and shouted:

"Sir Ralph! — Rorie! — my lord — Bordeaux — Oh, both o' ye—come awa'! Come awa'!"

In another minute we were running toward the tron gate, little Alexander Macmurtrie trotting ahead, puffing and exclaiming. Bordeaux and I came after him, my friend ejaculating and laughing. I too dazed between one thing and other to do aught but follow. The lawyer was almost dead with exhaustion when we came to the house in Glasgow Green. At the door he stopped and faced us.

"What a thing!" he gasped. "Who'd 'a' thought? The Lord's ways — in-

scrutable— Guid forgie's—maist amazing!"

Then, what with overhaste and an over-application of snuff, he fell into a most violent sneezing. When he had recovered his self-possession, he turned to me, his little eyes large with astonishment.

"Rorie!" he said, with ludicrous solemnity, "he's come!"

"Who's come?" I cried, with the fear that I was not yet done with young Jamie.

"Don Alvar—Don John's father— Mistress Mariposa's grandfather — Don Alvar de la Murcia y This y That and— *why everything!* Lord — bless — my — soul!"

With that, he flung open the door and led us into the parlor. We were no sooner in, than we wished we were out again. We had stumbled upon one of those sacred moments in human life. Mariposa was on her knees and her face was held close in the slender, delicate hands of the grandest old gentleman I had ever seen. He was Don John come to life; or, rather, as if he had been alive all these years and had turned white with age. He was looking down into the eyes of my love.

Alexander Macmurtrie was quick to observe and to act. He pulled Bordeaux to one side. I heard him offer snuff. I heard Bordeaux decline. I heard Macmurtrie suggest that perhaps Bordeaux preferred the rappee. He— Macmurtrie—was partial to the "Broon Cannel." I heard all this, but vaguely. My eyes were dwelling on a vision of the past.

Had all those years really passed, or was it all a dream? Was this not Mistress Mary, and was not that Don John? Presently he would whistle his lilt and—laugh—that careless laugh.

It had all passed in a second—a lifetime in a flash; and here we were at the end of the chapter, with Mariposa on her knees before this grand old gentleman, who looked as if in his happiness he could sing, like the old man in the Bible:

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace!

The picture was blurred in a mist of

emotion, through which presently came Mariposa. Her face was aglow with an almost holy loveliness. It may have been the tears in my eyes; but hers seemed to swim in a halo of tenderness.

"Rorie," she whispered, laying her hand on my arm. "He is Don John's father—m—my grandfather. He would speak with y—you."

Her voice broke in a happy little quaver, and she led me forward. I saw Don John's face, Don John's eyes, and Don John's smile lift to me.

"Ah, Rorie," said Don John's voice, but fainter and less merry, and with a strange foreign turn to it, "I have found my son's self in her, and in you I have found my son's friend. I know not how I should call you, nor how I should thank you. . . . Rorie, my son, give me your hand."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LAST OF THE ARMADA.

THAT was a great day for Mariposa and me, and I am sure it brought much happiness to the grand old gentleman who had traveled out of Spain for love of that son who, he now knew, was no more. It seemed as if Heaven, in giving Mariposa a name, had consoled me with one, too; and the same God who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb had poured balm upon the wound of Don John's death, by giving the old man Don John's child.

His coming was a wondrous surprise to all of us. Even Macmurtrie, who had a complete understanding of his presence, was taken aback. Our lawyer had acted in the search for the Spanish *don* at the behest of "the Lunnon brither of the profession," who had acted for others in the employ of the Spaniard.

Here was the power of rank and unlimited wealth demonstrated to us, but the greater power of human love was clear to us in the pathetic bravery of this old man. In the winter of his years, he had come out of Spain, into a country where he or his kind could hope to find few friends in these days—in the almost vain hope of finding alive that brave lad who had sailed with the Invincible, yet vanquished, Armada.

Don Alvar had not heard of Bordeaux's mission, or the result of it. It had been his wish that no means in human power be left unemployed to determine his son's fate, for, as I have since learned, the hero of my childhood was an only son, and by his life or death also hung the overlordship of almost an entire province of Spain. But love was Don Alvar's own motive, and if his hope was slain the moment he saw the locket on Mariposa's neck and heard the tale of it, a new hope sprang with the new love for his child's child.

Don Alvar's ship lay at Leith, whence it had sailed from London. The moment I heard of this ship, my heart sank, for I believed that it was destined to bear Mariposa away from me to her own people. But when I spoke of it to her, she shook her head.

"Some day, Rorie, I will go to Spain, but not before I have seen Killelan again—with you." She had not heard of my good fortune yet. "You have been my friend since I was a baby, and now that I have a name and fortune, would it be fair like, Rorie, to leave you?"

"Thank you, lass," I could only say. "It is more than I deserve." Which indeed it was.

"Tell me, lad," she whispered. "Was Don John—my father—like Don Alvar—my grandfather?"

"Lass, I could almost think he is your father grown old."

"Oh!" she breathed, with a strange awe.

"And you," I whispered passionately, catching her to me and looking down into her suddenly solemn eyes, "you are so like Mistress Mary to-day. If we could only love one another as they did."

"We do," she said simply. "But you must not doubt me again, Rorie. It makes you so unhappy. I think—I think I—"

"Well?" I said, for she had grown terribly solemn.

"I think I had better marry you," she said quite seriously. "Then you will know that I cannot run away from you again, even if I ever wished to."

"You dear, dear lass," I whispered, and she gave me the first great kiss of our life and grown-up love.

It was a great day for us all. We

gathered in Mistress Macmurtrie's parlor for a grand story-telling. Don Alvar sat by one side of the cheery hearth, with Mariposa at his feet. Alexander Macmurtrie and his good wife were at the other side. In the corner seat of the room sat Bordeaux, a gallant figure, between the delighted Macmurtrie girls. I, as chief story-teller, sat in the middle of the room, facing everybody.

It was, as you know, a long story to tell, beginning with the coming of the Spanish ship and my meeting with Don John. You may be sure there were many parts I left out, for it was not my purpose to hurt the old gentleman more than was necessary to an understanding of the history, and there were bits in which I did not figure well myself. As to that, Bordeaux came to the rescue when the story had progressed as far as Mariposa's capture by the Macdonald.

It was fine to hear Bordeaux's eloquence ring out. He had a wonderful gift of telling a tale, but although everybody was spellbound, my foolish heart was pleased to note how he praised me, and how Mariposa would glance up at her grandfather, as if to seek his approval of me.

Amid an exciting whirl of events, Bordeaux carried us into Glasgow. Then Alexander Macmurtrie, filling his nose with snuff, took up the history in a more prosaic fashion. He explained all about my family and my rights, and delved deep into Highland laws and customs which nobody understood aright. It was only clear that my people of Kilellan were a sept of the Campbell clan, of which the Earl of Argyll was the grand chieftain. It was clear, too, that young Jamie had abandoned his people, and that Mariposa and I were second cousins.

"So, between the twa of them," said Macmurtrie in his best Lowland English, "they are by heritage the heids o' the Kilellan sept. Of course, there canna be twa heids, though twa heids is sometimes better than one. Yet the twa heids in this case are that often thegither, that wi' yer lordship's permeession, there would be worse things than following the earl's advice and marrying the twa. It's been a busy day," added Macmurtrie, "but Ah'm a man that likes to clean oop o' a day's wark."

The climax to this great story-telling was finely received by everybody present. True, Mariposa buried her face between her grandfather's knees, and I wished the floor could swallow me, but I took courage from old Don Alvar's face. He nodded and beamed and held out his hand to me.

"My son," he said in that simple, grand way of his, "it would, indeed, be strange if one who has received such blessings of Heaven should say nay to any of these things, which are the manifest workings of a greater hand than ours. I have foreseen this with but one fear—that our religious ways differ somewhat. But let us leave those things for our kings to settle. When the king calls, let us arm; but when the heart calls, let us answer, too. Rorie, my son," said he huskily, "it is not for me to tell you, who have seen what a holy troth is love. And surely if Heaven so blessed my poor son's troth as to leave me this sweet maid, surely Heaven does not frown upon your country's usages. I have come from Spain," he added with a smile, "to dance at the wedding of my grandchildren."

Oh, what a day that was! And what days followed! Bordeaux and I were chased from the house in Glasgow Green, where such preparations were being made. I saw Mariposa but once, and that was when Don Alvar and she came to the door to chase me off: for, as the old gentleman said, there were but few days left until I should have her forever, and it was but meet that he should have his granddaughter to himself.

Alexander Macmurtrie was busy, too. As he always said, my affairs cost more time than I was worth. A messenger had to be sent to Kilellan, telling of my approaching marriage and return.

"And certes," said Macmurtrie, "if they dinna like it, they can lump it, for Argyll is oot o' patience wi' them. But, hoot toot! They'll be glad to see ye, lad. I gied them a harangue that'll ding in their ears after they're deid. I tell't them ye were the only sensible man in Cowal—Guid forgie me for the lee—and struck a peace wi' the Macdonalds, so that from now there's an end to 't."

"How did ye make the peace?" I asked.

"How?" chuckled Macmurtrie. "Ah'm their man o' law, an' breakin' the rules for once, I played twa sides o' the game."

The Macdonald's death troubled me little, and I am sure it was a relief to the lawyer.

"A heathen beast," was his opinion. "Though Guid forgi'e me, he's deid, puir man! Keep your tongue still, lad. He's gone to his grave an' none but you and young Jamie kens it, an' if that rapsallant comes here—Hech, sirs, ye're a ba-arb'rous lot!"

Young Jamie did come. It was on the day before the wedding. I met him as he came out of Macmurtrie's office. What passed between the lawyer and my kinsman I do not know, except that to-day James Black, or Campbell, is in the fighting service of the East India Company, which was chartered not so long ago. Between one thing and another young Jamie made a prickly bed for himself. Indeed, I sometimes feel sorry for him.

As I say, I met him at the door of the lawyer's office. At first I hardly recognized him, so cruelly had I beaten him. I held out my hand.

"James," I said, "I am sorry."

"Ye can afford to be!" he snarled, and, knocking my hand to one side, he marched away. I let him go.

If I were to tell you of our wedding and return to Kilellan, I should be tempted to go on writing forever. Shall I ever forget that morning as the post-boys changed the horses at Ninian's Tavern at Govan, when Bordeaux and Don Alvar and Macmurtrie and fat Ringan Scouler and the curate and the dominie stood up and drank to our happiness? Shall I ever forget the back of the post-boy bobbing over the leaders, while Mariposa and I, inseparable at last, cooied blissfully in the chaise. Ahead of us raced another chaise with Don Alvar and Bordeaux, while Alexander completely occupied another behind us armed with his precious snuff-box and volumes of legal instruments.

For we were all going back to Kilellan, and I can think of no regret, no

cloud, no doubt, which marred our happiness that day. At the Cloch Ferry the boats awaited with pipers in the bows, and when we reached Kilellan Bay my heart swelled and my eyes filled to see my people waiting for me and my bride. A score of the men rushed waist-deep in the cold sea to bring us to land. A hundred claymores rose and two hundred voices shouted the hail: then the pipes shrieked in triumph. Roderick Dow seized my hand and wrung it hard. And I knew then that he had been a good friend to me, as he had promised that day in the glen.

It is nearly two years since I began writing this book, but as I said in the beginning, I am not yet free with the Sassenach. And while my slow pen has been writing, such mischievous things as time, love, and Mariposa have been adding to my task.

As I said somewhere on the way, Bordeaux and Mariposa both promised to help me, but they have pestered me instead. True, Bordeaux wrote a bit, but it was so strangely worded that I begged leave of him to leave it out. Mariposa would ay promise to write the next chapter if I let her read the last; but she would find so many faults with what I had to say of myself that whiles we came nigh quarreling. Once, indeed, she showed me in a few pages how she thought the story should be written, but I grew so angry over the things she said of herself that she has never offered to help me with the book again.

But for all that it has been a sweet task. There were times when my heart bled, times when my blood chilled at remembrance, and times when the tears of my shame fell upon the pages. At the end of the chapter—that one about the dirk and the bannocks—I could not see what I was writing. The very dirk, you see, was lying on the table by my hand; and Mariposa, whom I had meant to kill with it, was sitting by the castle hearth, sewing away for a little man who was to be called John Alvar.

For, as I said at the beginning—which is so long ago that you have probably forgotten—a peace has come upon Kilellan Castle. We have lived in such quiet happiness ever since that morning,

when, after the great feast, Bordeaux and Macmurtrie left us. I can still see these two friends as they were helped into the boat. I can see the little lawyer solemnly offering snuff to our serving-man, Roderick, and I can see Bordeaux standing erect—but a little unsteadily—waving his bonnet and crying:

“‘Ah, parting is such sweet sorrow!’”

I have not seen him since and am not able to say who he is, save that I believe his real name is “Sir Ralph.” Sir Ralph What or what Sir Ralph, I know not, but Macmurtrie swears he is “Sir Ralph the Deevil.” Player, sage, knave, or fool, he at least was our good friend, and there is ever a welcome for him in Kilellan Castle.

Of our enemies, too, we have seen no more. Young Jamie is in India and like to stay there. The Macdonalds have kept the peace, and, indeed, after the chieftain’s death “at the hands of a murderous robber in Glasgow,” the small sept scattered and became lost among the Glencoe and Appin peoples. So that the cattle thrive in Cowal and we are sure to reap our own oats.

Don Alvar stayed with us at Kilellan Castle for many months. He wished us to return to Spain with him, but such was the nature of Mariposa’s desire to stay at Kilellan for a time, that her grandfather decided to wait, too. I remember, when little John Alvar had learned to smile at the approach of his great-grandfather’s footsteps, the old man said it was time for him to return to Spain, if ever he was to return at all. We strove to keep him with us, but he smiled and said no.

“I grow old,” were his words, “and

there is much to be done for my great-grandson.”

His ship was sailed around from Leith to Kilellan Bay. It struck me strangely that the Spanish ship should have plowed the wake of the fated Armada. On the day before his departure, Don Alvar said:

“Rorie my son, let us go to the cave. And,” he added, drawing his frail figure erect, “you will bring my granddaughter and my great-grandson, Don John.”

So we went to the cave, and over the two graves beneath the hollow oak, the old gentleman knelt and prayed. And over the two graves Don Alvar took the little lad in his arms.

“Rorie, my son,” said he, “when he is a year older, and when Mariposa wills, you will bring her and my great-grandson, Don John Alvar, to Murcia. And, Rorie, when you come to Spain, you will tell them”—his eyes twinkled moistly—“you will tell them you met Don John!”

It was in the dusk of the next day that we watched the sails of Don Alvar’s ship sink beyond Ailsa Craig. A summer haze was upon the Firth and the hills of Bute and Cowal were purple with heather. Mariposa and I stood together at a window of the castle, watching the Spanish sails deepen from gray to blue, from blue to brown, and finally merge with the sea and sky.

It was like the vanishing of the last of the vanquished Armada, but where the ship went down a great, clear star rose out of the sea. Mariposa saw it, too, for our eyes were fixed on the point where we had last seen the ship. And we both had the same thought. As I turned to look at her, she lifted her eyes and our lips met.

(The end.)

DAY’S END.

Lost heart of mine, the day is swift and fleet,
Even alone,
A thousand voices in the city street
Blend with my own.

Lost heart of mine, across the shadowed land
I miss the light.
Darkness! I cannot touch your hand!
Then falls—the night.

Gertrude Brooke Hamilton.

TWO SONS.

BY WADE WARREN THAYER.

A SHORT STORY.



LANI sat cross-legged on the porch and took her scolding in silence. Not that she felt she deserved it all, but Mel's torrent of scornful sarcasm was so continuous and so high-pitched that it did not seem worth while to try to interrupt. So the elder sister had her say out, and all of Lani's delinquencies were paraded forth in detail. But the very uncontentiousness of the culprit finally brought the tirade to an end.

"Why don't you answer me? Why don't you deny it, if it isn't so?" Mele cried at length, dropping the hat she had been braiding while she talked, and turning upon her sister, exasperated at the meekness with which her lecture had been received. "You know that Kali is twice the man that Paki is. Yet, you let Paki hang around you all day long, playing his guitar under the palm-trees when he ought to be working in the taro-patches or fishing on the reef, like Kali. Paki is a fool, with his singing and his loafing and his cigarette-smoking."

"He's not a fool," Lani broke in suddenly. "He led his class at the great school in Honolulu, and he won the debate and the silver medal when he graduated. He's not a fool."

"Oh, he's bright enough," Mele conceded, "but he's a fool, just the same. Wasted all the money old Laa left him already. His taro-patches are all grown up with weeds. He has sold the canoes his grandfather made fifty years ago far up in the forest and brought down here to the sea. Soon he'll not have anything left. Then what will he do?"

"I don't care," the younger girl said stolidly. "I like him better than that old Kali. All he thinks about are his

taro-patches and that new house he's building, and his stupid old father lying helpless there on his mat in the old grass hut."

"You don't see Paki bother much about the old man," retorted Mele quickly. "And yet old Mana brought him up as his own son, when his mother died and his father went off in the whale-ship. Kali and Paki grew up like brothers. But Paki never even goes to see the old man now, since the court gave him his grandfather's property to waste."

"Yes, he does," Lani said, "and old Mana thinks a lot of him, too, for he always wears that silk shirt that Paki brought him from Honolulu, and he's always talking about him—how smart he is, and how much he has learned at school."

Mele merely sniffed, and went on with her hat-making.

"You are all against Paki here in Kahaluu," Lani said bitterly, "and you are all trying to set me against him: but you can't do it. I like him, and I don't care who knows it."

"And yet, before Paki came back from Honolulu, with his fine clothes and his guitar, you used to think a lot of Kali," her sister reminded her. "Kali is worth two of Paki. I've been married long enough to know a man, and Kali is a man."

With this sententious utterance, Mele rose and went indoors. Lani sat looking musingly out through the trees, where there was a glimpse of the sea shimmering in the sunlight.

On the distant reef a brown figure was visible, thigh deep in the surf, fishing with net and spear. It was Kali, and the full bag which hung from his shoulder showed that he would have a good load

to take to the Kailua market to dispose of profitably to-morrow.

II.

THERE came a clatter of horses' hoofs, and Lani woke from her reverie to see two mounted men coming along the beach road from Kailua. She recognized Paki by the flame-covered kerchief about his neck and the jaunty angle at which he wore his hat. The other was a foreigner, and, with the instinctive shyness of the Hawaiian girl, Lani slipped from the porch and hid in the angle of the stone wall which bounded the road.

"There is Kali," she heard Paki say to the stranger, as they passed, "out on the reef, fishing. That's good. Mana will be at home alone, and if we hurry we can get this thing all fixed up before Kali gets back."

"I don't altogether like this business," the white man replied. "I almost wish I hadn't come over here with you."

"It's all right, I tell you," Paki assured him. "The old man will be perfectly willing to sign the papers. He thinks a lot of me. I was his foster-son, you know."

Their voices died away to a murmur, and Lani, crouching in her corner, strained her ears to catch the last words. What were they going to do? What papers did they want old Mana to sign? Their conversation had been in English, and Lani had not caught the full meaning of it all. She sat up suddenly, as an idea occurred to her. Perhaps Paki wanted old Mana to give him his lands! Her sister's words came back to her. Paki had sold his own inheritance and wasted the money; now he wanted Kali's. Oh, no, that could not be! Paki was not that kind of man. She was vexed at her own momentary disloyalty to him.

But what were Paki and the foreigner going to do at Mana's house? She rose to her feet and gazed after the two men. She thought she recognized the white man as a shyster lawyer who used to hang about the courts at Kailua. Why had Paki brought him to Kahaluu, and why was he so glad that Kali was not at home? Why was the white man so reluctant to carry it through?

Misgiving filled her mind, followed by

a growing fear and distrust of Paki and the white stranger. She looked away seaward, where Kali still labored in the surf with his spear and net. She might go and tell him.

But tell him what? That Paki and a stranger from Kailua had gone to Mana's house? He would laugh at her. They had not been good friends of late—since Paki had returned from Honolulu and dazzled her with the splendor of his raiment and the tender tones of his rich barytone voice.

Stirred by a sudden impulse, she scrambled over the wall and ran down the sandy road to the place where Paki and the white man had already tied their horses among the keawe-trees. The two were picking their way through a thick growth of lantana-bushes to the little grass hut where Mana lived. Lani waited only until they had entered the low door of the hut. Then she slipped noiselessly through the thicket after them, and paused just outside the door, listening. There was a murmur of voices within.

"Here are some papers for you to sign, father," Paki was saying. "You know I told you the other day that you were growing old and you ought to have your property looked after better. I learned all about these things when I was in Honolulu, and I have had the foreign lawyer fix the papers so it will be all right. He has come with me to see that they are signed properly."

"Why should I sign any papers?" objected the old man querulously. "Kali is my heir. It will be all his when I die."

"Oh, but you are not going to die yet," said Paki easily. "These papers are to see that your lands are cared for while you are living, and that they go to Kali when you are dead. You don't want the lands to be fought over in court after you die, and have the lawyers get all of them, and Kali nothing."

The old man wavered, and Lani heard him mumble to himself. Then he said:

"Where is Kali? I don't like to sign anything when he is not here."

"He went to the mountains this morning," lied Paki, "to hunt for some cattle that had strayed. It will be useless to wait for him. The lawyer has come

all the way from Kailua to settle this matter. He cannot wait."

Lani stayed to hear no more. So this was the man she had thought she loved!

What was it that he wanted old Mana to sign? Why had he lied about Kali? She did not know; she did not care. But she was sure of one thing—that Kali must be summoned at once.

All her old regard for him, latent through these months in which Paki had reigned, came back; and in a flash she knew that it was Kali all the time that she had loved—good, patient, plodding Kali—and not Paki, after all. And she was glad, glad; especially since now it had so befallen that she might help him in this crisis.

III.

SHE burst panting from the thicket out upon the dazzling white sands of the beach. There was Kali, just across the little arm of the bay, poised on a rock, his brown body, clad only in a scarlet breech-cloth, glistening in the sun. She called his name again and again, fanning her hands over her mouth to speed the sound. But the surf broke all around him, and he did not hear.

What should she do? It was too far around the bay to reach him in time: the papers would be signed, and the lawyer gone to Kailua, before they could get back to the house. The little bay was narrow at its mouth, and at times the tide ran swiftly, but she must chance it. She must swim to him.

Quickly her long *holoku* dropped from her shoulders, and, clad only in her loose white *mumu*, she dashed into the surf. It was a short swim—barely a couple of hundred yards. Every now and then she thought, with a shudder, of the sharks which infested the whole of the Kona coast and sometimes entered the bays alongshore. But all went well. Presently she drew herself up on the rocks beside the astonished Kali, and gasped out the story to him.

"You have done this for me, Lani?" he said, when she had finished, taking her hand and trying to look into her eyes. "You have done this for me? I thought I had lost you. I thought you loved Paki, and my heart was very sore. Tell me why you have come to me. Tell me."

"Oh, we must not stop, talking, here," the girl cried, sudden panic seizing her as she gave a furtive glance into the ardent eyes of Kali. "We must hurry, hurry! The papers will be signed, and your land will be gone forever."

"I don't care half so much for my land as I do for you, sweetheart," said Kali, and he drew her to his side. "Tell me why you came to me."

"I think—it was because—I love you, Kali," said the girl. Then, with a sudden, quick smile into his eyes, she leaped from the bare brown arms that would have encircled her, and plunged into the sea.

He was beside her in a second, and together they clove their way through the transparent waters, shoreward. In the middle of the channel Kali paused to look back; and, as she forged ahead, Lani heard him cry out sharply. "Faster, faster!" he cried. "A shark!"

Over her shoulder she saw, coming swiftly after them, the black triangular fin of a man-eating shark, cutting the surface of the bay like the bow of a racing canoe, and sending little ripples of water either side. The first crossing of the channel had been easy for Lani, but she was already a bit out of breath from the fast swimming. Now, with this new and deadly peril at her heels, fear almost paralyzed her.

Not so Kali. Years of fishing along the coast made him familiar with the ways of the shark. He stopped swimming, and, floating easily, unwrapped his throw-net, which he had slung over his shoulder before he leaped from the rock. The great fish came on, and, as it neared Kali, it swung slowly and lazily onto its side, exposing the long, white belly and the gaping undercut mouth, with its prominent rows on rows of sharp teeth.

Kali waited, treading water, until the creature was almost upon him. Then he gave a quick throw, and the shark poked its huge nose into the enmeshing folds of the net. Kali sank out of sight as he made the throw, and the floundering, bewildered shark shot over him.

In another second Kali came to the surface, twenty feet away, and was soon at Lani's side, assisting the frightened and almost exhausted girl shoreward.

In mid-channel the huge fish was

thrashing the water into lather, making short dashes hither and yon, in baffled search for its lost prey.

IV.

SCARCELY waiting to catch their breath after reaching the shore, the two sped, hand in hand, through the bushes to the little grass house of Mana. They heard voices as they approached, and Mana's words, in the high-pitched tones of old age, came to them.

"I've signed it, Paki," he said. "but I shall not give it back to you until Kali returns. If you say it is all right, it must be, for you have studied at the great new school in Honolulu. But Kali is my child—the only blood relation I have—he must see it before I give it up."

"This is foolishness, father," Paki answered. "Would I lie to you? I, whom you brought up as your own son, when—when—"

His voice died to a gurgle in his throat as he saw Kali standing at the doorway, his naked body gleaming bronze in the sunlight. Beside him was Lani, her loosened hair flowing over her shoulders, her drenched gown clinging to her figure, showing every line of its rounded perfection.

Not a word was spoken as Kali stooped and entered the door, squatting beside the old man, who lay stretched upon the matted floor, and taking his hand and looking into his eyes.

"What is it, father?" Kali asked, pay-

ing no heed to the others. The lawyer edged his way to the door and slipped out.

The old man raised himself on his elbow and drew forth a folded piece of foolscap paper from under the edge of the mat upon which he was lying. He handed it to Kali.

"They wanted me to sign this, my son," Mana said in quavering tones. "And such is the love I have borne to Paki, my adopted child, that I signed it willingly, knowing that he could not lie to me. But when the lawyer wished to take it away with him before you returned, I would not give it to him. While they two talked without, I hid it here. Take it, my son. If it be right to give them this paper, you shall say."

Kali took the document, and went to the doorway to read it. Lani had seated herself on the mat by the old man, and, taking one of his hands, she strove to soothe and quiet him, for he was shaking with the emotion of the last few moments of mental struggle with Paki. Kali read the document slowly through, once and twice, while Paki watched him nervously.

"I am no lawyer, Paki," said Kali at length. "but I have seen many deeds. This one I shall deal with thus." He tore the document twice across. "I think you will find the air in Kailua good, and the fish abundant, and the *poi* of superior flavor," he said significantly. "Kahaluu is a small, quiet village. You will like Kailua better."

THE STAR.

THE splendors of the sunset die;
The city's din grows dull and far;
Low in the saddened western sky
Appears a single star.

A world withheld from strife and pain,
Serene, remote, untroubled, still.
A sphere, perhaps, the blessed attain,
Where life may learn and love fulfil;
Where may the spirit win its will,
A tortured soul find peace again.

The night draws darkly over me;
With lamps the heavens lighted are.
One that was blind at last can see—
We, too, dwell on a star.

Donald Kennicott.

THE QUALITY OF GENIUS.

BY FRANCES CHAPMAN.

A SHORT STORY.



It wasn't because Jorne was stupid; it was more because Mrs. Jorne was so remarkably brilliant that people said: "What *do* you suppose they talk about when they are alone?" If it happened to be Jorne's friends speaking, they would say: "What *do* you suppose they talk about when they are alone?" It was only by the accented word that one could tell whether Jorne or his wife was the one to whom sympathy was due.

Her friends would explain: "You know, they were so young when they married!" and his would surmise that "possibly she was different when she was young." Yet Mrs. Jorne wasn't in the least formidable; she was what the men called "a good mixer"; they liked her, and thought she was "awfully smart, and all that; but—" They seldom got farther than the insurmountable "but."

It was true that the Jornes were little more than boy and girl when they were married. She now told herself a little bitterly that she had been obliged to marry in order to escape her intolerable environment, the lack of appreciation and understanding that surrounded her younger days. Certainly now she couldn't complain of lack of appreciation, for Jorne admired with passionate pride her many accomplishments, her elegant adaptability, and the graceful alusiveness of her speech, which he was seldom able to catch or understand.

If now and then her manner held a hint of tolerance, it was because Jorne made the fatal mistake of showing her how frankly aware he was of his own inferiority. However, Mrs. Jorne honestly tried to make the most of Jorne's good points. She was proud of his aristocratic birth, and that he always looked so like

a gentleman. She had a certain cultivated poise and self-control that to Jorne was as natural as the breath of life. She took considerable satisfaction in thinking that if he didn't talk brilliantly, he at least never talked foolishly; and there were times when she very humbly, and with a peculiar frankness, admitted—to herself—her own superficialities, and was grateful for Jorne's unfailing admiration and belief.

He placed her far above himself; and there was a time when he tried to climb up to her, as people living in a valley try to climb to the top of a mountain to get one clear, uninterrupted view; one deep, full, untainted breath; but she didn't stretch out a hand to help him up; she didn't even see him; he was so altogether outside the range of her mental vision. So, step by step, he lost his footing and stumbled back into the pleasant valley of his own simple, spiritual outlook.

That Jorne was not a money-maker didn't worry his wife, for she had a very genuine disregard for riches, or the merely rich among her acquaintances; but she hated to see him so cheerfully content with an inferior position, so lacking in ambition to forge ahead and make a success of the thing he had undertaken. It sometimes seemed to her that she supported their uncertain fortunes; that she alone could save them from complete overthrow. That it was only moral support she gave did not make the weight less heavy and disturbing.

When Jorne failed to receive the promotion in his business that should have been his by right of precedence and length of service, he felt sorry for his wife. As for himself, he didn't really mind; he liked his present position, and said that the man who had been advanced

over him was "a fine fellow, and just as considerate as he could be." Mrs. Jorne thought, with contemptuous pity, what a faithful, loyal valet he would have made.

When Jorne had his long illness, his wife nursed him with untiring care. The years that had brought separation of interest and pursuit had never brought real separation of heart. She felt the tender yearning for him that a mother feels for a child in whom she can trace none of her own best talents or abilities.

The illness stretched over weeks, and more than once the physicians held out little hope for his life; and Mrs. Jorne realized vividly her dependence on him, her need of him in every way. During the long convalescence the thought often came to her—if he had died, what could she have done to make a bare living for herself?

Her friends had always said of her, "She will do something some day." But the thing she could do was never more clearly defined than "something," and during this time she realized that she possessed no knowledge or accomplishment that had a marketable value.

A musician once said of her, that he had never heard any one play with more exquisite feeling nor more incorrectly. A German professor said that she had a real genius for idiom and choice of words, but she couldn't construct a German paragraph correctly. Her friends all thought she could write, but the publishers didn't. She had no useful, homely accomplishments that she could turn to account. She felt a very genuine and wholesome distaste for herself, as though she were in some manner a cheat and a counterfeiter.

When the doctor suggested that they should go to the suburbs, where Jorne could have more out-of-door life, it was no sacrifice for her to leave the city and her small coterie of admiring friends. She wanted to begin afresh; to readjust her focus on life. She was not bitter, but she accepted with sad finality the fact that her life was cast in narrow lines; that she had overestimated herself; that she hadn't the goods to deliver.

She had a feeling of shamed relief when she thought how shocked her friends would have been if Jorne had died, and she, instead of the brilliant

achievement they expected of her, had clerked in a store or addressed envelopes, in an office, which she now humbly estimated to be about the extent of her real ability.

The change in her reacted beneficially on Jorne, as she took more interest in the homely duties of her every-day life. To her surprise she found that she liked it; that there was a certain zest in overcoming household problems that heretofore she had regarded as sordid and beneath her careful consideration.

II.

JORNE loved the suburbs. He potted around the yard, cheerful and contented. He had always been happy. Some one said of him, that when they heard him speak without seeing him, they imagined he was smiling. He found that in patching fences, keeping a greensward that was the envy of the neighborhood, pruning his fruit-trees, and getting beautiful results from a kitchen-garden, he was happier than he had ever been before.

Mrs. Jorne was glad of this, as she was glad of anything that got him away from the dull routine of the office; so when he came in one day and announced that he was going to keep bees, she didn't discourage him, but simulated an interest she didn't at all feel in his plans and purchases.

He was absorbed in his new hobby, as he called it, and his wife noticed with amused admiration that he didn't neglect his garden or the flowers, that his lawn was as velvety green as before; and she admitted that he was remarkably faithful and persevering in his undertakings. All of his holidays and spare moments were spent in his tiny apiary, where everything was arranged with mathematical precision and exactness.

One night he came home with two large ledgers, which he spent several evenings ruling. When finished, they were works of neat perfection. He then proceeded to keep a record of his bees. He would spend hours watching them, and afterward would make neat little notes of his observations.

Mrs. Jorne's readjustment of her life was not easy. There were times when faith in her own wasted abilities burned high; she felt that she had laid them as

a sacrifice on the altar of her own humility. She was filled with bitter unrest and dissatisfaction, a sort of contempt at herself for finding even occasional contentment in her narrow and ever-narrowing life.

Jorne was making no progress in his business; she had found no congenial, inspiring acquaintances in the little suburban town where they lived; there was no incentive to display or cultivate the talents with which she felt she had been endowed, and she felt that she was spiritually going through a solidifying process that would finally leave her hard and insensible to the call and gifts of the big, beautiful, outside world.

One day, when she was feeling specially low, Jorne came in, warm, smiling, and unconscious of her dark mood.

"That old chap who moved in next door has been over looking at my bees," he said. "He seems to be a pretty bright old fellow, and I imagine I can get some pointers from him."

"Who are they?" she asked indifferently.

"I forget his name. Hold on—he gave me his card—here it is," and, fumbling through his pockets, he drew out a crumpled card and handed it to his wife. She glanced at it, and then looked at it more eagerly as she said with a laugh:

"Oh, Dan, Dan, you are hopeless! You couldn't remember his name! And it's Maximilian B. Kauter, Ph.D., and half a dozen other titles if he wanted to use them."

Jorne had a look of funny perplexity on his face as his wife explained that Dr. Maximilian B. Kauter was one of the most noted scientists of the day.

"I remember reading that he had been in the city lecturing, but, of course, I never dreamed of his coming out here. Why, Dan, everybody knows about him; everybody! I don't believe you could find a schoolboy in the city who doesn't know about him and his wonderful experiments and discoveries."

Jorne looked a little sheepish and ashamed as he whistled softly and confessed: "You don't say so! Well, I'm blessed if I ever heard of him."

Mrs. Jorne felt a new thrill of interest in life to know that there was a *really great*

person living on the other side of their fence! A great person, who, she afterward found out, had come to their village for rest and study; who excluded the villagers from his life, and yet visited over the back fence with her husband and took an interest in his bees and garden. She was quite shocked one day when she heard Jorne daring to argue, and actually succeeding in convincing the great man that his method of growing tomatoes was wrong.

She was anxious to meet him. There was no one else in the village who could meet him on an intellectual plane. She anticipated his surprise and pleasure at meeting so well-informed and superior a woman in such an out-of-the-way place. But the great man's visiting continued to be done over the back fence, and she had an injured feeling that Jorne was keeping him to himself, perhaps not intentionally, but he was dull not to see how much she and the great chemist would mean to each other.

One day Jorne came in and said: "I was telling the doctor about my records and notes. He said he'd like to see them, so I asked him to come over this evening. I want you to be sure and come down, because I've always felt that you would know how to talk to him about a lot of things I don't know anything about."

She said a deprecating word, but inwardly she was fluttering. He would be the first person of renown she had ever met, and she felt that in her he would recognize one of his own kin.

III.

DR. KAUTER came and seemed charmed with the gracious wife of his neighbor. He talked entertainingly of the village, the near-by city, touched once or twice on his life abroad, and the conversation flowed easily and delightfully over a number of light and interesting topics. At length he turned to Jorne and asked to see the records of his bees. Jorne blushed like a schoolboy as he brought out the books and explained apologetically:

"They aren't much; I'm almost ashamed to show them to you. I don't really know anything about bees, only those out there in my back yard."

But the great man was not listening

to his apologies. Adjusting his glasses, he slowly turned the pages of the books, every now and then murmuring: "Why, why, this is really remarkable! Quite ingenious, upon my word! Something decidedly novel!"

Jorne sat in uncomfortable, self-conscious embarrassment, and Mrs. Jorne thought: "How generous genius can afford to be!"

"Where did you get the idea of these records, Mr. Jorne?" asked the doctor.

"Well," said Jorne, "when we first came out here I wasn't very strong, and those bees were a sort of pastime; and the records, too, for that matter. I'm a sort of methodical old maid, and I began keeping the records for fun; then, afterward, I got interested in them. I find they are considerable help, too, from season to season."

After a little more talk about the bees, Mrs. Jorne delighted the doctor with her music, and afterward made some tea. As she handed around the cups, she had a conscious little feeling that "this was the sort of thing the doctor was used to."

She wondered if he were not surprised to find any one in such a stupid little village performing these gracious acts of hospitality with such ease and familiarity. Jorne, who didn't like tea, and who had never drunk it after dinner as a refreshment, gulped his down, bestowing on his wife beaming glances of admiration and approval, which she pretended to ignore.

After that, Dr. Kauter came frequently and sat on their porch or in their tiny parlor. He was always entertaining, and seemed to be entertained. He was fond of music, and Mrs. Jorne never played so well as when she had him for a listener. She was sure he liked her, and yet she had a baffled feeling, as though she had never revealed herself to him. He never talked books, his science, or even bees to her; but he would sit in the broiling sun for hours with Jorne watching a hive, or lean over the back fence half the morning discussing and explaining the fertilizing and fattening of soil and the improved methods of cultivating fruits and vegetables.

Under his interest and suggestion, Jorne's enthusiasm for his apiary had waxed and grown. He had constructed some hives which Dr. Kauter pronounced

superior to anything he had ever seen, and he urged Jorne to have them patented; but it was not until Mrs. Jorne joined the doctor in persuading him that he considered it worth while.

One evening, as the doctor was looking over Jorne's new notes and records, he said: "Jorne, I think you ought to do something with these. There is some very unusual and original stuff here. I believe you'll make some money with your hives, and I think you can prove yourself something of an authority with these notes. They are really unique."

As usual, at a word of praise, Jorne was unhappy and embarrassed; but the suggestion had fallen on fertile soil and taken root in his wife's mind. Why not? Of course, Jorne couldn't write a book, but *she could*. He had all the uninteresting data and statistics, and she had the ability to put the thing into readable form—"whip it into shape," she was soon telling herself airily. Here was a chance to prove to herself that she had the ability to do something besides the soul-carking routine of housework.

At first she thought the title-page should bear their names as collaborators. Then, one day, in a burst of noble self-abasement, she decided that Jorne's name should appear alone; but it would be her work, a sacrifice of her unselfish ambition, an atonement to herself for her shortcomings. When she told Jorne of her decision, he protested that it wouldn't be fair. That if she wrote the book—and, of course, he couldn't write a book—she should take the credit. Anyway, whether it bore his name or hers, every one would know that she wrote it. Inwardly she agreed with him, but she persisted in her intention.

She was really interested. She read dozens of books on the subject, and was able to make many valuable suggestions to Jorne, which he applied to his own bees successfully; but he let her do the reading. He only watched his own hives, and made notes on what he saw therein.

Mrs. Jorne worked tirelessly for six weeks, reading, taking notes, and hunting up references. Then she wrote the book. It was the only thing worth while she had ever done.

It began, "Bees, the little almsmen of spring bowers." It read like a novel.

The language was simple, fluent, poetical. Apt bits of verse were inserted, and exquisite imagery relieved the cold tabulation of facts.

Jorne was charmed and so proud of his wife that if she hadn't sworn him to secrecy, he would have told every one he knew about their work; for it was *their* work, as Mrs. Jorne found it necessary to appeal to him for exact information more frequently than she had anticipated.

IV.

WHEN it was finished, they planned to show it to the doctor. The showing of it was to take on almost the dignity of a ceremony. Special little cakes had been made to serve with the tea, and Jorne foolishly insisted on pinning a gay little rose in his wife's hair.

Dr. Kauter came, unsuspectingly enough, and innocently made things easy for them by asking: "By the way, Jorne, when are you going to do something with those notes?"

"Why," began Jorne, "we; that is—er—I have been at work on it, and I was just going to ask you to look it over. It's pretty good, too, I think."

There was a quizzical little pucker at the corner of the doctor's mouth, and Mrs. Jorne felt annoyed. She meant that the doctor should recognize her hand and brain in the work, but she wanted it revealed in a more subtle manner.

He took the manuscript and went carefully through the pages. At length he finished, and, folding them, said softly:

"Ah, yes; quite good—er—quite beautiful. I may say, quite interesting, and—er—quite a good deal of literary style."

Jorne stirred uneasily, and Mrs. Jorne thought she would scream if he said "quite" again in that purring voice; but she asked, with a little quaver in her own tones:

"Won't you tell us just what you think of it? Dan wants your honest opinion."

The doctor looked at her keenly for a moment, and then inquired in his gentle voice: "May I ask if you have preserved your notes and records, Mr. Jorne?"

"Oh, yes," Jorne quickly replied; "they haven't anything to do with this

—that is—I mean, I've been making them right along."

The doctor's face was grave, but Mrs. Jorne felt as though he were smiling behind his hand, as he continued suavely:

"Well, those were what I meant you to use—your own notes and records. This manuscript is exceedingly good; indeed, remarkable!" and again Mrs. Jorne felt that behind that grave face he was making a satirical bow to her. "But what is wanted in work of this kind is original research. This"—tapping the manuscript—"would make a charming magazine article for the layman to read; but I'm afraid it wouldn't add much to the history of bee-keeping, or—pardon me if I seem too blunt—to your reputation as an authority; for that, my dear sir, is what I consider you to be. Your notes would be of inestimable value to others, as they are new and first-hand information."

"This"—touching the pages before him—"shows much preparation and study, but it has all been said before; and, I really don't want to be discouraging, but—er—it is a li-t-t-le too flowery to be used as a work of reference. Your notes, exactly as they stand, your own observations from day to day, are what I should advise for publication. Books of reference are rarely inspired, but they often show great genius; and that word has never been better defined than by the great Englishman who said that genius was only 'an infinite capacity for taking pains.'"

He ended with an apologetic little cough, and turning to Mrs. Jorne, said kindly: "And now, dear lady, I've not been making myself very agreeable; won't you soothe us with some of your delightful music?"

The tea was drunk, and the little cakes were eaten, but only the doctor seemed to partake with any sense of feasting.

Jorne was furious. After the doctor left, Jorne declared him an ignorant old fool with no taste for literature. "Literature" to Jorne was a vague term—poetry or "fine writing"—which he couldn't understand, and which conveyed no meaning to him. He said the book should stand as she had written it, or not at all. But his wife silenced him.

"No, dear," she said, "the doctor was right. I'll do something else sometime more in my own line." She had to say that. For his own sake she couldn't bear that he should lose faith in her. "I can see how your notes, as you have prepared them, would be more useful than if put in the form I tried to."

But Jorne was unconvinced. He vowed he didn't want the notes published anyway; that he didn't care anything about fame, or making a reputation for himself; he wasn't a genius and had never pretended to be one; that all he was, she had made him. Even his beehives, which promised to make them a comfortable income, would never have been patented if it hadn't been for her sympathy and encouragement.

She let him talk, warmed and soothed by the knowledge that he sincerely believed every word he said. But down within the well-springs of her being, her egotism had received a shock that meant a complete readjustment of her attitude toward Jorne.

It made no difference that his attitude toward her was unchanged, his belief unshaken. She felt that a covering had been stripped off. For a moment she

had been face to face with her real self, cowering and ashamed behind the rickety, unsubstantial thing she had been proud to call "myself."

She realized that all of her discontent had been caused by sham and pretense. She had rather despised Jorne's simple, happy, almost childlike nature, had liked to think of her own as subtle and complex; but she now acknowledged that he was genuine, the real thing. Dr. Kauter had recognized it, had seen through her from the first and despised her shallow artificiality.

His definition of a genius had been a polite way of rebuking her superficial glitter, the glib smartness that could write a scientific book, with gleanings from encyclopedias and compendiums, in six weeks!

Her husband entered the room as she unpinned the rose he had fastened in her hair—the gay little rose that was now only a dead and blackened weed.

He came over and, standing beside her, smoothed the hair back from her forehead, and he was startled and mystified as she turned and pressed her face against his shoulder with passionate humility.

OUT OF DROWNING VALLEY.*

BY S. CARLETON,

Author of "Last Luck Lake," "The Corduroy Road," "The Real Rosamond," etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SCARLETT KEEPS A PROMISE, AND THE DRINK DIES OUT OF JIM WELSH.



ANY other time Halliday would have been about equally exercised at a girl appearing in camp in the middle of the night and the unlooked-for arrival of Eldon, but he was too sick with his slackness about Burns to really care for either of them.

The rain had stopped, and the black darkness was heavy with sulfur—moveless, without life—and what it meant smote Halliday between the eyes.

"By Heavens, Red, it's the flood coming!" he gasped, and Scarlett grabbed his arm for silence. There was more than the flood coming. The night might lie black as the pit, but in it the gully mouth was belching men. If he could have seen them, it would have been different. It was like ghosts they came—walking, riding, falling over themselves in the

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for May.

dark—anywhere, everywhere, all around him.

If it had not been for the girl, who hung heavy in his arms, he could have fought them off; now, even one shot would bring a circling fire on her that could have only one end. There was nothing for it but to make for the canoe and go.

"We'll get," said Scarlett briefly. It was time. Even as he gained the water's edge after Halliday, with Athol, the foremost Tabeak man rode fair into the camp. The crash of his horse coming down covered Scarlett's stumble, as he plunged into water that was thigh-deep where he had left the canoe high and dry.

"The flood!" Halliday muttered frantically. "It'll be on us in another hour!"

Scarlett knew it; knew, too, that if it had not been for Burns he would not have cared for twenty floods. They could have been safe down the lake in an hour. Soundlessly the two men got into the canoe, with the girl between them, and pushed out into deep water. Halliday turned where he knelt in the bow.

"Heavens," he said, "we'll have to leave Burns! The lake's up five feet now."

"You left him," said Scarlett brutally; "you're responsible."

As he spoke, something caught at his breathing, and the inside of the lower cave rose before him, with the lake water pouring down it on a man, left to die like a rat in a trap. He looked at the lowering darkness of the sky, tasted the thick air that seemed to stick in his lungs, and with brute instinct knew what they meant when added to the lightning that had carried no thunder.

There was just one chance to get Burns out alive—to do the man justice, he never thought of his gold—and that was to do it before the thunder broke that was surely coming. One good peal of it, and down would come that landslide Sabiel had talked of, to send the lake water into the caves, like Niagara into a drain.

He took one thought of the girl, who was motionless in the canoe in front of him. She was all he wanted in this world. She had come to him, even if

she hated him, and to save Burns he must risk her. Involuntarily he turned the canoe down the lake to safety—and remembered he had given his word to Burns that at the last pinch he would save him. Even for Athol Gray, he could not break that. He brought the canoe up with a jerk.

"Athol," he said harshly, "I'm going to put you and Halliday on shore. There's a man I've got to pick up in the caves. I'll come back for you. You and she"—he turned on Halliday—"could keep low somewhere."

Halliday hesitated—they might and they might not. But the girl took the words out of his mouth.

"I couldn't go," she panted. "I couldn't walk—any more."

"I guess she's best here," muttered Halliday. "Whew! Look there!"

There had been nothing to look at but black darkness, filled with the noise of men cursing as they found the camp empty; but Eldon had changed that. He had cleared the men from the empty camp with one word, slipped inside, and fired the spruce-bed. It and the dry bark lining caught like tinder. As Halliday bade Scarlett look, they flared up into one gigantic torch, and in its light they saw Eldon and Jim Welsh stand out plainly. In the dark, beyond the fire's radiance, the canoe lay blotted out; but it was within ear-shot. Eldon's question to Welsh carried across the water:

"Where next? You said you knew."

The drink had died out in Welsh with the wet ride. Scarlett saw him motion Eldon querulously aside. He could not hear what Welsh said, which was that he had never promised to show him the gold—only the way into the valley; but, with a sick premonition, he leaned over to push Athol down so that she could not see the shore, even as with the other hand he fired full at Eldon.

But the one motion spoiled the other: and, anyhow, both were late. With the same unreasoning savagery with which he had lashed his horse across its face, Eldon had turned and shot Welsh through the body.

"Oh, my Heavens!" cried Athol. "Uncle Jim! Oh, Uncle Jim!"

The cry floated across the water, and

Eldon jerked up his head. But, if he called out anything, it was drowned in the fusillade of the Tabeak men as they realized where their quarry had gone; in their yells, as the leaping bonfire showed them Sabiel's pile of canoes. As they fell on them, Scarlett thrust his gun into Athol's hand.

"He was dead as he fell," he said swiftly. "Don't waste fire on them. Shoot if they come on us."

The canoe leaped like a live thing as he and Halliday swung it round toward the caves. It was a race for their own lives and Burns's now, against more than the flood. In minutes—seconds—Eldon's whole gang would be after them.

It was curious that, instead of looking where he was going, Scarlett looked at the sky. They might yet save themselves and Burns, if there were no thunder; with thunder, they were heading for their end. So far, there had not even been any lightning; Eldon's men had not seen them, had only shot blindly at the flash of Scarlett's gun—and, as he thought it, the whole world was light, trembling blue, green and sulfur, round an unbearable glare of white that arched the sky.

In it Scarlett could see the cave mouth lying half a mile ahead of him, and knew Eldon must see the canoe plain as a black blot on the iridescent lake. He swerved it sharply aside as the dark fell on his stinging eyes; but there was no shooting from the shore. He did not even look to see what Eldon was doing as he put his back into his paddling.

The last thing in his head now was to fight for his gold. Time to get Burns and go was all he wanted, for a heavier hand than his would settle Eldon.

"Provided it doesn't settle us, too," Scarlett thought fiercely, for the feel of the water under him was ominous.

It lifted palpably in great lumps; there were no waves—no breath of wind to make them—yet the lake was rising like something alive, hunching under a burden.

There was time yet to turn and leave Burns, but he could not do it. He cursed himself instead that he had not shoved Athol and Halliday out on the bank somewhere, and come on this mad business alone. They were almost at the

cave now: the mouth of it showed wide in the ceaseless lightning, with the water lipping horribly high in it. There was no shelf of rock now to wade over; he could not so much as feel it with the tip of his paddle. The canoe brought up against a wall of solid stone inside the cave; and, as its bow touched, Scarlett turned on Halliday.

"Get back with Burns. Quick! It's"—with a savage significance—"our only chance!"

He did not mean of escaping Eldon, but the waters of Drowning Valley.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TABEAK MEN.

ON the other side of the lake Eldon had stood motionless, while the Tabeak men lugged down the canoes. Each and all of them had put Welsh's death down to Scarlett's bullet. If they had needed egging on against him, that would have done it.

Eldon never so much as looked down at the dead man. He was well rid of him; for without him he had seen the black opening on the farther shore, for which Scarlett's canoe was making. It was there the gold must lie. As glare after glare lit the sky in an almost continuous light, Eldon marked its position, the mountain at whose base it lay, the great obelisk towering in the middle of the lake to the right of it.

He watched Scarlett swerve in his course to go behind the huge rock, and realized that to pass on its other side would save half a mile; yet he made no move to cut him off. Once he lifted his gun to take a shot at the girl who sat amidships of the flying canoe, but he dropped it again.

That would come later. It was she who had saved Scarlett all along; she who must, somehow, have warned him to-night, or Sabarin would not have lain dead in the rain. He would have her begging for mercy yet—which was better than missing her at long range. Scarlett was certain to make a stand in the cave mouth, and Eldon was ready for a fight there; yet, to Inkster's surprise, he let the Tabeak men paddle off without him.

"Why ain't we getting off?" he blurted.

Eldon made no answer. The explanation was simple, only he did not choose to give it. The Tabcak men could take the full front of the cave and the first fire; the fewer of them that lived through it, the more gold for Mr. Eldon. He and Inkster could creep up last at one side; with any luck, just when Scarlett had forgotten them, perhaps when all his cartridges were used.

Eldon grinned as he saw the Tabcak men outstripping him in the race for the gold they were never to see. It was not till they were nearly out of sight that he got into the canoe where Inkster sat in swearing impatience. It was up the lake he went, in front of the towering rock that even he saw was like a giant Indian. Perhaps if he had known Sabiel's superstition about it, he might have crossed at its back—and perhaps not. He was capable of any daring to gain his end to-night.

He wanted the gold of the great cave and Scarlett wiped out, with as many of the Tabcak men as Providence saw fit to remove by the bullets of either friends or enemies. He looked forward grimly to the excitement of doing it—by other men's work, if possible. Eldon's successes had always been got by remaining in the background. He slipped high up the lake, ready to come down the shore unobserved and finish a half-fought fight.

But Red Scarlett was more ready for him than perhaps he knew. As Halliday and his candle disappeared down the black passage at the back of the cave, he swung his precious canoe high and dry behind the left side of the cave; at the right a rampart of living rock stretched half across it, and he drew Athol down behind it.

If they had to shoot, the flash of their guns would draw no fire on the canoe; and the wall before them would keep stray bullets off Athol. She had never spoken to him. She did what he told her stolidly. Now, as he leaned in front of her to make sure of the height of their rampart, he felt her shiver.

"Dear love, what?" he whispered: but it was doubtful if she even heard him.

"Uncle Jim!" Her hard-held calm broke in a sob. "He was good to me,

I might have done more to stop him to-night. Till I die I'll feel I failed Uncle Jim."

"Do you mean—because of me?" he questioned hoarsely.

"No. He'd have gone with Eldon, just the same, if I'd never spoken of you. But I might have said something I didn't to Uncle Jim. I think," she added pitiously, "that if I could go back and tell him so, even now when he's dead, that he'd understand."

"You can in the morning."

Compassion for her cut Scarlett's soul, but he dared not touch her. He was not too sure they would ever see any morning, either. Their bare lives hung now on the speed with which Halliday got back with Burns. If he delayed, they could fight off Eldon's men; but they could not fight off Drowning Valley in flood.

Scarlett listened avidly for Halliday beside the girl, who wept silently for Jim Welsh; but there was no sound in the clammy darkness, that was thick against his face, but the lap of the lake water. Every minute he could feel it rising—every minute it lipped higher on the rock between it and him. He spoke to get the sound of it out of his ears.

"Athol, how did you get to me?"

"I turned back—after I left you." She flinched at the nearness of his voice, but she stood still. "I hadn't anywhere to go."

And then—then she had heard Eldon's men come on Sabarin, and thought it was on Scarlett. She might hate him, but she could not stand that. She had raced her pony madly to the sound of shooting, to die by him if needs must—but she could not tell that to a man whose wife was between her and him.

"I thought I wouldn't care if they killed me," she substituted bitterly; "but it seems I did. They nearly had me when they came on Sabarin, and I—let the pony run. I couldn't stop him till I came on your horse. Then"—she sobbed once with shame—"I couldn't care what you'd done. I knew I was on the track to your camp. I turned the pony loose with yours and followed you. I—I'd got afraid."

"My heart," said Scarlett pitifully; "my little heart!"

There were things he was bound to tell her; but he dared not begin on them, for he had to look for Eldon now—and suddenly knew where to do it. The lightning had stopped, and out of the pitchy blackness beyond the cave came a swirl of paddles, a fusillade of bullets that flattened harmlessly against the rock in front of him or sang high above his head.

It was Eldon's vanguard of Tabreak men, coming—all together—in a huddled mass, shooting as they came. Scarlett shoved a revolver into Athol's hand, but he held it as she would have fired into the flashes.

The first canoe had too much way on: the men in it had not allowed for landing on bed-rock. It slammed in head first against the very stone Scarlett crouched behind, up-ended with a shattering crash, and sent its cargo flying into the deep water behind it.

"Now," said Scarlett.

He fired into the shouting confusion as the other canoes piled in against the wrecked one. If he could beat them off before Halliday came, he could save Athol yet. As he shot mercilessly into the shooting and the yells in front of him, he felt the girl firing steadily by his side and his heart was filled with a fierce joy in her. The strange night was helping him, too: in the dark Eldon's men had no target—and, as he thought it, jagged lightning tore the black half-circle of sky in front of him. He had time to see the Tabreak men in it as they fought like devils to gain a foothold on the rocks before—for the first time that night—the world crashed with thunder.

It sounded like the whole mountain shattering above his head, like something let loose that would never stop; and in the very middle of it came a lower, duller roar.

Scarlett had only time to be conscious that he flung himself round Athol, clamping his hands and feet into the crevices of the rocks, before a wall of water was over him. Stunned, suffocated, he hung on by instinct, crushing the girl between him and the living stone he clung to.

It was the end. He and she had got to die here, without a word or a kiss, because Halliday had betrayed his trust

and forgotten Burns. He was conscious of an immense anger against Halliday as the water covered them, of pressure that was agony; then—nothing!

CHAPTER XXV.

LUCK PEOPLE WOULD SELL THEIR SOULS FOR.

BATTERED, stunned, drenched, Scarlett came to himself with a sickening sense of movement that stopped as he realized it. Very far off a voice said something; another answered it; but he took no interest in either of them. There was warmth and softness under his shoulders, and he rested against it with closed eyes. His dazed brain repeated to itself mechanically that Sabiel's land-slide had come, and he was still alive. But he was horribly worried about something; he could not remember what. Suddenly the name of it wrenched loose in his head.

"Athol," he muttered—"Athol!"

He opened his eyes, and was abruptly certain he was crazy. The upper cave was gone—and the dark. He lay by the great mother-lode in the lower one, with candle-night shining in his eyes, and Halliday staring at him.

"Where's—where is she?" he whispered, and realized that the softness behind him was her arm.

"I'm here." She was not the stony girl who had stood by his side waiting for Eldon. She was stroking his face, mothering him. "Lie still. It's all right. Eldon's gone."

Stupid from half drowning, it seemed to Scarlett that everything was all right if she were touching him. Yet his eyes strayed past her, as if he looked for something.

"How did I get here?" he asked dully. "I don't remember coming."

"I guess you don't." Halliday had turned away from the two, but he turned back again. "You got knocked out. I lugged you down here. I didn't know what else to do."

"Knocked out!" Scarlett looked at him vacantly. Suddenly Athol's face where she knelt, dripping, over him, brought recollection to him with a jerk that sat him bolt upright, sick and giddy.

"What became of Eldon's gang?" he demanded. "I was shooting at them when there was some kind of a wave or something. I don't remember past that."

"I guess what happened to them was simple," Halliday answered grimly. "The first lift of the lake, that nearly did for you, lifted them and their canoes up against the solid cliff over the cave mouth and washed them like eggshells. I found you stuck like a limpet on that front ledge of rock with her"—Halliday nodded sheepishly at Athol—"jammed in between you and it. Why you didn't go out with the backwash I couldn't tell, till I had to pry off your fingers to get you clear."

"To drag me here!" Good, healthy rage cleared his tongue. "What on earth for, man? A dog's sense would have told you to chuck me into the canoe. There's none in being here. What kept you away for so long in the first place? We'd had time to go over and over before Eldon's lot showed up."

Halliday looked round him queerly, then at the passage to upper air that showed black in the light of his candle.

"Burns is gone stark crazy was why I couldn't get back in time. He wouldn't stir from here without his gold. Time and again I got him dragged half-way up, and he pulled away from me. I had to let him bring the stuff at last, and tote half of it myself. That was what kept me. And"—he hesitated as if the words would not come off his tongue—"Red, I brought you here because I had to. *She* said Eldon wasn't with those men that got drowned. I didn't suppose sitting in the top cave waiting for him, without any guns, would have been healthy if he'd dropped in."

Scarlett exploded. "But we could have *gone*."

"Not easy," Halliday answered, with his back turned to hide his face. "You see, the canoe'd gone, first. I guess she just went out on the backwash like a basket, and my gun was in her. Heaven knows where yours and hers went to."

Scarlett had been ready for a good deal, but not for this. His bad luck had caught up to him at last, and he was tasting the whole savor of it where he sat on the cave floor. He had brought the girl he loved to—this.

"Where's Burns now?" he asked unexpectedly.

"Going up and down the passage like a spider, lugging all the gold back here. It's no good talking to him," Halliday said bitterly. "He don't hear you."

"Then it's no good worrying about him either. We've done all we can." He sat frowning at nothing, and Halliday spat at the empty forge.

"I guess he'll straighten up by morning," he suggested hopefully.

"Morning!" It was Scarlett who straightened up like a bar. He shoved his fatigue and his soreness away from him. "We've got to get out of these caves now—to-night—if we have to swim. We're not safe here ten minutes."

"Swim?" Halliday tried to grin. "We thought of that before we left the front cave, and she couldn't and I couldn't; and I guess you looked in fine shape to teach us, when we couldn't tell if you were alive or dead. Besides—"

"Well?"

"Oh, there ain't any landing this side of the lake—not if you clawed your finger-nails off on the cliffs. I guess the other side's kind of far," he ended simply.

Scarlett was silent, eying the incredible gold round him. All of it was not worth one leaky canoe to him now. There was something so black in his stare that Halliday took fire with injury.

"I did the best I could, bringing you here!" he exclaimed. "I guess Eldon's dead—she couldn't say for sure he wasn't—and Sabiel's flood's over. I don't see what you mean by not being safe."

"You will," Scarlett answered bitterly. He pointed in front of him to the passage Halliday had dragged him down. Out of it a tiny stain of fresh dampness was spreading darkly, growing as they looked at it. Athol's eyes fell on it with a curious light in them, but Halliday, the stolid, turned sick at his stomach.

"You don't mean," he gasped, and fell silent.

"The lake's just beginning to get in its work," said Scarlett dryly. "That wave as you called it, was only the first spasm as some landslide came down. Now the water that started it will be tearing into the lake. It takes about four hours to fill, Sabiel said, and I guess you remem-

ber what *you* said about this place and Niagara in a drain?"

He did not look at Halliday. Only at the girl, who was standing away from him now, whatever she might have done before he came to. She despised him, because he was a jailbird; she had been forced to take refuge with him; and it had been only pity for a man she thought was dying that had brought her arms round his neck. If she had never seen him she would have been safe and at home. Now, she had death in front of her; plain dying, alone, with a man she hated.

"My God, if it were only plain dying!" Scarlett thought. Before it came it would be Heaven knew what—starvation, maybe; surely suffering. She was wet and cold to the bone now. It would serve him right if she turned on him and cursed him with her last breath. But it had not come to dying yet. While he could he moved to her, and caught her hand.

"We're in a nasty place," he said. "I'll get you out if I can. God knows I didn't mean to bring you to it."

"I'm not afraid," she began.

If it had not been for Halliday she would have flung her arms round him; sobbed that she would never be afraid with him; that the woman between them was no matter any more, now that they had to die. But Halliday stood between them, and Scarlett had moved back sharply at the thrust that cut like a knife. She did not know yet all there was to be afraid of. It would be easy to get up the passage again, but it would not make a way out to look at the black lake rising by inches. It was better here, where they could not see.

He wished dumbly that he and she were alone there. He had so much to say when it came to talking. Now he had to do, and, in the name of Heaven, he did not know what. He moved irresolutely toward that passage where the wet mark was widening. Burns shot past him like a rocket, coming down loaded with his gold from the upper cave. He forced even Halliday's solid bulk aside, with the speed of his impact, and vanished out the back of the place.

"Where does he go—with his gold?" demanded Scarlett.

"Up that place you thought was a back way out. My Heaven, Red—" Halliday stopped. The two men stared at each other with the same thought in their heads. Suppose it were a way out now; suppose Burns were not so crazy as he seemed, in carrying all his gold there?

"I dunno." Halliday was the first to speak. "There was no outlet yesterday, and I guess there wasn't enough of a convulsion of nature to clear one now. I could look, though."

"I'll go." A mad hope shot through Scarlett's blood. He grabbed Halliday's candle, and was off after Burns. Half-way up the tortuous passage he met the man coming down, his eyes dead black in his white face. A sharp revulsion of hatred took Scarlett at the sight of him. He had always been sure Burns was crazy. What had possessed him to risk his all for Scarlett's sake? He would have pushed by him, but Burns stopped in his trotting run.

"I've put it all there, high as I can," he said confidentially, "so I can go to it when the water comes all black and oily. I can hold on to the gold like an anchor. It's heavy. It won't let the water sweep me down the other way."

He trotted on again, but a vision had flashed up before Scarlett of precisely that other way Burns had once saved his neck from. It might possibly be that that sluice would be enough to take even the overflow from the lake; that the other way, where he and Halliday had vainly tried to get through to the space the air came from, was higher level enough to let them cling like bats to its top end till the flood went by.

He raced up to it, stumbled over Burns's piled gold, and stood there. If he had had a vision that the landslide might have shaken the mountain enough to make a way out, it was gone. The air came in, as it had always come in since his pick had stuck in the tiny vault over his head, but there was nothing altered—no widening in the opening to let them through. Even if there were, it might have been to another cave, that for all he knew might connect with the black pit he had so nearly slid into.

The level was higher than the passage that led to the latter; that was the only

crumb of comfort he got. But it was not high enough to save them if the water filled the tunnels to their roofs; and as for clinging on to gold or anything else while the flood rushed by, it was a madman's notion. The tiny bags of gold would lift like dead leaves.

But the air-hole, and staying by the air-hole, was their only thread of a chance, where honestly and really there was no chance at all. He knew all the "ifs" and "possibles" he had been saying to himself were just so much waste breath when the flood really came. His knees shook, and his brain felt like something loose in his skull, as he relit the candle the air-draft had blown out and went back to the two he had left. Halliday raised his eyebrows as he entered, and Scarlett shook his head.

"We'd better go there all the same." His voice felt like dry ashes that would not come out of his throat, but it sounded gentle and every-day. "There's—more air. Get up the candles, and Burns's blankets and things."

Halliday nodded silently and disappeared. Scarlett turned to Athol, and to his surprise she held out both hands.

"I know," she said in a queer voice. "Halliday told me while you were gone. Since we can't get out I can tell you something. I'd rather be here with you, no matter what happens—if we die here—than be safe without you, anywhere in the world."

"Oh, sweet, when it's all my fault! With a dog's sense I could have saved you. I ought to have known it was no good to think of getting Burns. We could have been away by this time."

"Only it wouldn't have been you that saved me that way, and I'd never have spoken like this." She nestled close in the arms that held her, and hid her face on the strong throat. "We'd have had to die some day, even if there'd been nothing to part us," she murmured. "You first or I first, and one of us in the world alone. It's luck—luck people would sell their souls for—to do it together."

Scarlett crushed her to him. He could not speak to her. Presently he said she was brave.

"I am now," she answered simply. "I was frightened to-night when you

said it was true about your wife. I thought the only thing I could do was to get to Janesville and old Mary before I was mad enough to say I didn't care."

"True—about my wife?" Scarlett gasped blankly. "I haven't any wife. Did Eldon tell you I was married?"

"It was what I asked you to tell me the truth about." She stared at him wide-eyed. "I wouldn't believe what Eldon said; but when I snatched the letter he'd read me, and saw it signed Sophia Scarlett, what could I do but believe? And I couldn't love you—like that."

"Oh, sweet, and I thought you despised me because I'd been in prison. I knew I wasn't fit for you. I'd told you so; but, to think I was married!"

"I wouldn't have cared what else you'd done," she went on bewilderedly. "But when I read 'the little wife, Sophia'—"

Scarlett interrupted her roughly. "You read a fool of a nickname," he said bitterly. "that I never could break her of using. My father called her that; and she—good Heavens, Athol, she was my *father's wife*—not mine!"

"Do you mean she's your *mother*?" she asked dazedly.

"She's just my stepmother," said the man simply. "I've taken care of her ever since my father died. I'd have looked after a cat if he'd loved it; and I did my best, even for a thief."

"A thief?"

He nodded. "I wouldn't tell even you if I didn't have to. She couldn't help it—it was mania. She was pitiful—frail, pretty, and nearly as young as you."

He pulled the envelope she had taken from Eldon out of his pocket, took out the letter Athol had read, and glanced at it. It was the kind he was used to. Sophia never wrote without begging to be taken away from the sanatorium where he had had to put her, or suggesting she was in rags.

The thicker enclosure stuck. He tore the envelope impatiently, and there fell out a third note, in the man's hand which had addressed the whole. It was from the sanatorium doctor; and for a moment he could not take in anything about it except that Sophia—pretty, weak Sophia

—was dead. Presently he read that it had been sudden at the end, but that Mrs. Scarlett had perhaps expected it, since she left the accompanying sealed enclosure which he forwarded according to her last wish.

The kleptomania had been quite cured when she died, the sanatorium doctor added simply. It happened so sometimes when the physical health failed. He begged Scarlett to believe that everything had been done for his stepmother, and all affectionate care bestowed on her by a most faithful nurse.

"What is it?" asked Athol gently.

Scarlett handed her the doctor's note. "She was dead when Eldon lied about her—poor soul. He mayn't have known that. I don't know." There was no doubt that when he lied he had seen the sealed enclosure. It had been torn open rudely, and Sophia Scarlett's pitiful letter read. Only Eldon knew why he had not torn it up then and there. Perhaps his own name in it had been a satisfaction to him. It was he alone who had got Scarlett two years in prison; and he had never been quite sure of it before, in spite of his boasts. It began as Sophia always began: "Dearest Boy." But what came after was not like her.

When you get this I shall be dead, and there are things you ought to know then. I never was the kleptomaniac I pretended to be to you; I was just a plain thief. When I made you take me to New York because I said the West reminded me of your father, and I couldn't be happy there, it wasn't true; I just wanted to get back to New York.

When you got work there how did you suppose I spent my days? I said it was in the house, making cotillion favors to sell. It wasn't. I went from shop to shop and took little things you couldn't afford to give me. I was quick; I never was caught. I think I never would have been caught, and I swear you never would have gone to prison for me, if, one day, I had not run on a man I knew in the West before I married your father.

His name was Eldon, and he hated you—though Heaven knows I didn't know it then. I was ashamed to tell him I was your stepmother; I said I was your wife. I thought it made me safer with him, too. He might be afraid to tell the things he knew about me if he thought you were my husband.

He used to come every day, and when we went out together I took things. I had never stolen once when I was out with you, and I never would have but for him. He told me you were crooked; that I was a fool to be afraid of you, and that you would know what to do with anything I got. I was a fool, for I believed him.

Do you remember the day I dragged you into that jeweler's shop? You do, for it was the last day you were ever happy. You bought me a pin for Christmas—I have it yet. While you paid for it I made the man show me a diamond necklace because it was pretty. I told you I was quick. I changed my own rhinestone necklace for it: the diamond one was in my hand—the man had put the other away—when I turned around and saw Eldon looking at me across the shop.

I don't know what possessed me: I was mad with fright. I slipped the stolen necklace into your pocket. The jeweler didn't see me; I know that it was only Eldon. Going home, I cried, and I told you lies about being a kleptomaniac, because I thought when you found the necklace you might take it better so. I hadn't told you you had it. We were barely in the house before the police came; and I can see you now, just standing dumb and not answering when they took you away.

Eldon never appeared against you; he had done all he wanted when he gave our address to the shop, and said he saw you take the thing. He just vanished. I let you suffer for me—let you waste your youth in prison—let you support me when you came out, and never had courage to tell you I was just a plain thief without the courage to pay.

I never saw Eldon again but once, and then I knew he hated you. It was you he had worked against, not me. I warn you against him, even now, but I never could tell you to your face. I was glad when you put me in this place, though I said I hated it. I'm ill now, and I hope I'm dying. I want you to forgive me when I'm dead. If ever a woman was grateful to a man for what he did for her it is I—your father's wife.

SOPHIA SCARLETT.

Scarlett looked up as he came to Sophia's straggling signature, but Athol's eyes were on the floor, where the deep stain widened.

"You went to prison—for her," she said slowly. "But—why?"

Scarlett's mouth twitched. "I suppose because I was a fool," he said simply. "But I was pretty young—I didn't know

what else to do. She'd just told me she was a thief, though she'd called it by a bigger word; and it never came over me *why* she'd told me till the police came. She wasn't fit to go to prison, even if I could have turned round and given her away. She'd have died of it. I hadn't time to think what to do, anyway. You see, the diamonds were in my pocket—one of us must have taken them—and I'd promised to take care of Sophia."

"And Eldon knew?" All this time she had never looked up. "While he told me those lies about you and your wife, he'd read this. He knew all you've told me?"

"Yes—he knew."

The girl looked up now. Her eyes were shining, deep sapphires as they met his.

"If I'd never loved you before," she said slowly, "I'd love you for what you did for that woman till the day I died. I'm thankful they shot at me to-night"—she laid her arms round his neck—"for if they hadn't you'd have died here alone, and I'd never have known all Eldon told me was a lie."

Scarlett's heart gave a great jolt that swung the blood through his veins.

"Die here," he cried. "We're not dead yet, sweet. We'll have a try for living, anyhow. You and I can't die, and lose this—and this."

He kissed her, mouth to mouth, very long. They might have but little time together, but it was better than fifty years alone. Mad as it was, the two were happy as they moved after Halliday, leaving the great lode dark and deserted as the light of their candle vanished up the sloping passage.

For twenty minutes the cave lay empty. Then, out of the passage from outside grew a light. Burns, candle in hand, with a strange, leering smile in his eyes, came in from the upper cave. Behind him were Inkster and Eldon.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WAY OUT.

BOTH men were dripping wet, but neither gave a thought to it. There, before their eyes, plain even in the feeble candle-light, lay the great

lode of Drowning Valley. The richest of the world were theirs; and they had run Scarlett to the ground! It was that, more than the sight of the incredible gold, which made Eldon's face triumphant. Mechanically, he covered Burns with the gun he had somehow managed to keep dry, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

He had had luck to-night; utter, blinding luck! The wave that had half drowned Scarlett and quite drowned the Tabak men, had caught him so far from shore that he had got off with a cap-sized canoe. The shots, the drowning screams of his allies, were no surprise to Eldon; what was a surprise was to find himself in the cave after all. In the dark and the upset, he had lost his bearings and all sense of the direction of Scarlett's citadel. He had cursed as he and Inkster righted the canoe they clung to, and got back into it, each astride of an end.

They could do nothing but wait for daylight, and they had not even troubled to paddle. There was a current coming from somewhere, and they let it take the canoe where it would. The gentle set of it ran—against all Eldon's wildest expectations, against all probabilities—straight into the mouth of the cave he had lost.

For twenty yards in it was ankle-deep in muddy, troubled water that covered all sound as the canoe slid gently in; but there was no doubting it was the right cave. For in it shone Burns's candle, on Burns, with his back turned, gathering up his last load of gold.

As Eldon leaped on him, the man screamed, but the sound of it could not carry down the long passage to his friends. Perhaps Burns realized it, for he lay quiet. Presently, under the threat of Eldon's gun, he answered sullenly everything he was asked. Only once did his eyes light—when Inkster, having made fast the canoe, sighted the bags of gold and ripped one open with a joyous oath. Scarlett would have known the look on the half-crazed man's face, but it was wasted on Eldon, just as his glance at the lake behind him was wasted. Then he cringed to his captors and turned traitor, to all seeming.

"Scarlett?"—He was by the gold.

"Guns?"—He had none.

"Where was the gold?"—He would show them.

"Was Scarlett in this cave?"—Yes; unless he had gone out the other way.

"Other way?" said Eldon sharply, and for the first time Burns looked at him.

"Oh, yes; there is a back way out of here," he said slowly. "I can show it to you later. Now, if you want to get the gold, you'd better come with me, without making a noise Scarlett could hear."

Eldon took him by the back of the leather belt that held his rags together, more for guidance than security, for the man looked weak as a rat. With Inkster at their heels, they crept down the long, sloping passage. As they disappeared, a little wave lifted the abandoned canoe, a little trickle of water edged from it toward the passage entrance. Neither Eldon nor Inkster noticed it, but Burns smiled fiercely, and was still smiling when he brought up in the lower cave and pointed silently to the great mother-lode.

He was used to Halliday and Scarlett; but these strange men should have no share of his gold, that he had worked and sweated and been shut up for. He did not think of breaking away from them to warn Scarlett, but the last little bit of sanity left to him worked insensibly in his subconscious brain. He knew, none better, how voices sounded in this lower cave to any one who lurked above it. He would let these strangers talk—and then something would happen to them. He did not know what—but something.

Eldon had stood dead silent at the sight of the prodigal gold. It was this Scarlett had kept to himself, this he had been selling dribblets from, when there was enough to upset the markets of the world—but it was not the gold that lit his eyes. He had come down on Red Scarlett just as he had intended, when his guns were gone and he thought all danger was over—and he wanted Scarlett under his hands. To-night, for good and all, should wipe the old score clean.

"Where's Scarlett?" He forgot to whisper.

"Scarlett? Up there." Burns glanced at the dark passage at the back of the cave. "Be quiet!" But his own voice rang loud; rang as the subconscious Burns meant it to ring.

Eldon glanced at his gun, at Inkster, and motioned to the gold. "I guess we'll have to fight for this," he said.

"Fight for it!" Inkster's heavy face suffused. "I'd fight damnation for it!"

Greed lit his eyes; if he had once said it was useless to kill Scarlett, he had no scruples now. He caught up a loose crowbar that was the first thing to his hand and stood weighting it—a bigger man than Halliday, and mad drunk with the sight of the endless gold.

Eldon touched his revolver to the back of Burns's neck. "Now you find us Scarlett, and if you warn him by one word—" The movement of the gun was swift, yet in it he changed his mind. "No, you'll show us the back way out first!" For he would run no chances of Scarlett's escaping by it, nor other men coming in.

"It's easy," Burns gulped—"the back way! I'll show it to you when—you need it."

He was dead white and shaking as he moved forward. The whole floor of the lower cave was wet now; he shook worse as he saw it, but he went on. Around the corner, out of the light from his candle, where the five passages forked, and the widest one ran down to depths unspeakable, stood—just as that something that was not Burns had thought they would stand when he spoke aloud in the cave—Halliday and Scarlett!

It was Eldon who was taken by surprise. If Scarlett had been in front of him, the business would have been simple; but he stood at one side, within arm-reach. For one second Eldon fumbled his gun—the one second that undid him. It went off, harmlessly. There was a wrenching jar in his hand, and the gun was gripped in Scarlett's. Inkster lifted his crowbar and stood back with a queer, vacuous expression on his big face. Eye to eye the four stood. Halliday's hand with a big lump of rock in it; he was a dead shot with stones, and if Inkster had a gun he should have no chance to use it.

Burns alone looked at none of them.

This was not what he had meant to happen to the strange men; he could not remember what he *had* meant for them. He clutched his candle and stared behind them, to where the single passage led from the cave to the five branches where they stood. Insensibly, Eldon backed away from him.

Above the five men, Athol Gray's face made a white point as it caught the last radiance of the faint light. It was she who had first heard voices, first thought of Eldon; for it was he alone she had shot at when the Tabak men came, and not once had the lightning shown her his face among them. But she knew better than to speak or move now.

"If you've anything to say, Eldon," Scarlett drawled, "get it out!"

Eldon snarled wordlessly; he would have backed again, but he did not dare.

"I have, then." Athol would never have known the voice for Scarlett's. "You did a mean murder to-night, and that deserves dying for. You made a miserable girl a cat's-paw to betray me once, and that deserves it worse. If you want to know how I know it, it was in the letters you stole. You missed your aim there, like you've missed it everywhere else—you can have that to think of when you go the way you sent Jim Welsh; you may thank God if you go as quick. Put down that crowbar!"

Inkster dropped it with a clang that cut Athol's raw nerves. She wanted to cover her eyes, to scream, to have the thing over; this cold, slow Scarlett was not the man she knew. But she could not move her stare from Eldon and Inkster, from the dark behind them and Burns's candle—and there was something wrong with her eyes, for that darkness was slowly turning lighter. Fascinated, she gazed at it—in a dream, that Burns's yell cut like a knife.

"The water! The water!" he screamed.

It was no dream; it was death! Up the passage to them, driven as by a force-pump, came a wall of white water tearing to find its level. It caught Inkster at the knees, swayed Eldon where he stood, swung past Burns's feet, foam no longer, but black and oily, as he had seen it once before. Whether he thought of his own end or not, no man

can say; but he knew what he meant to happen to the two strangers at last.

"The way out!" he shouted. "The way out!" He beckoned Eldon, and, candle in hand, turned to run with the water, up the wrong passage—the one that led to the lipless pit he had once shut his eyes not to see, when he saved Scarlett there.

"Burns!" roared Scarlett. He grabbed for the man, lost his footing, and missed him.

Eldon saw his chance and took it. He leaped over Scarlett, and, knee-deep in water, tore after the man who carried the light, who knew the back way out. If Inkster ran too, or fell, and was swept away, Scarlett never knew; for, like Niagara, the main passage filled to the roof. He felt Halliday grip him and haul him up the narrow one, where once there had been a way out. There was none now; yet, with the girl between them, they scrambled to its end.

Sabiel had been right; the floods had saved them the trouble of getting rid of Eldon and Inkster, but it was small comfort to them now. A few minutes and the water would follow them. It was nothing to them if the dark pit that was taking Burns and Eldon would presently drain it off, for it would have been up to the roof of their refuge first.

"Burns," said Halliday, trembling. "Oh, my God, *Burns!*"

But Scarlett did not hear him. They had put out their candles at the first alarm of Eldon, and in the dark the roar of the water seemed closer with each second. He seized Athol to lift her to his shoulders, and set her down again. Above them, close over their heads, was a furious grinding crash like thunder, that turned to a slow shattering. He had time to think the roof was coming in on them, to ward off a stone from Athol's face, before she screamed:

"It's a star! I see the stars!"

The man's head was up and back before the words were out of her mouth. There, above him, slipping aside before his eyes as the roof of a theater slips, the great stone that had blocked the way out slid back. Through the hole he had never thought could open shone the blessed stars through a rain of pebbles that stung his face.

"We're out," he said in almost the same drawl that had threatened Eldon. "We're clean through the mountain: there's been a landslip on this side, too!"

It had cleared the way before them as nothing else but dynamite could have done, but he wondered if it had cleared it in time. As he swung Athol to his shoulders, bade her find a firm hold, and then climb, the water surged to his ankles. Her feet were on his shoulders, the stones she clutched at rattled about his ears, and suddenly he could have shouted with exultation. Her weight lifted—she was out! But as he turned to Halliday, the water reached their knees.

"You next," he said peremptorily. "You're the heaviest!"

He had suddenly remembered Sabarin's bridle, and Halliday understood as he shoved it into his hand. For one doubtful moment his great bulk was on Scarlett's back: the next, he was hanging to something, climbing and pushing as he had never done in his life. If he were not out quick, Red was gone. Somehow, he was out. His wide shoulders past the gap that had been easy for Athol's slimness; but it seemed years before he heard his own voice calling to Scarlett to catch hold—years again while the bridle dangled loosely.

It nearly dangled so forever, so far as Scarlett was concerned. It was not long enough: and the yard of bare space between it and him meant the yard between death and life! As he gathered himself together to spring once more for it, a rush of water, slapped to his chin, lifted him bodily for one second before it ebbed back whence it had come—but in that one second his hand had closed on the bridle.

It was his own, not Jim Welsh's, or it would have snapped with the strain, though Halliday knew better than to jerk it when he felt the weight on it. He braced himself against rocks that might or might not hold him, and suddenly knew Scarlett had found foothold: but as his head emerged from the hole he knelt by, he could only grab at him wordlessly.

"They were out—clear—saved! But

what it meant to Red Scarlett, Halliday did not realize till he saw him scramble up the open hill to Athol Gray and catch her to him in the sweet, living air.

"I guess I was wrong about Red's wife," he thought dazedly. "He ain't the kind to—to—" But he did not finish. The two had forgotten him. For the second time that night he turned away.

By the time noon was high over the hills, Halliday had long known for certain that there had never been a woman in the world for Scarlett but Athol Gray. Somehow they got to Sabiel, how—Halliday never knew, for he was asleep on his legs most of the way. But Scarlett had no sleep in him in the queer, light-headed happiness that sang in his blood. He stood with Sabiel by the camp-fire at the lower end of the lake and looked silently on a changed world.

Behind him, Athol rested, dry and warm, till he could take her back to the roadhouse on the buckskin, leaving Halliday and the Indian to get out what they had saved of the gold that had been the whole world to him when first he saw Drowning Valley—as no man would ever see it again.

Where they had camped for so long was deep water. Where Jim Welsh's weak soul had left his body, a great current set and swirled from a river that peared down from the head of the lake where no river had ever been—that had the mouth of the great caves for its only outlet, and would wash down endlessly on the sepulcher where Burns and Eldon would lie forgotten till the last day.

The great obelisk, the giant guardian of the Indian's gold, was gone, being no more needed; for neither white man nor Indian would ever look again on Drowning Valley gold. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the Indian turned to Scarlett, with a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Best so," he commented slowly. "There come ito more people to steal and murder for it. And"—he looked significantly to the heap of blankets where a girl slept, dead-weary—"my debt to you is paid. You get what is more than much gold—out of Drowning Valley!"

(The End.)

OWNER OF THE PELONCO VALLEY.

BY MABEL WREN.

A SHORT STORY.



THE man looked neither to the right nor left as he rode steadily onward. Rebellion was written on every feature, but it was not the rebellion that yields only to death—the face was too weak for that. Weary resignation would soon replace the stern lines that had for days encircled his mouth. He had been defeated, and he knew it.

Some two years before he had come to the valley, had drilled a couple of wells, and had built him a house and turned out some cattle on the range that for years had been lorded over by Safford. It was government range; but Safford had never hesitated a moment when fencing off the water from others or turning the feeble stream of the valley, so that his cattle and his land would get the water at the expense of the other settlers.

Against the alkali, the drought, lump-jaw—and Safford, he had struggled and struggled.

"By Heaven!" he whispered fiercely. "It hain't right—nothin' hain't right in this world!"

He had been to see Safford that very day to plead that he might be allowed to live.

"You've no right to fence off the water. It's government land and it's against the law," he argued.

Then Safford had sworn a terrible oath.

"The law!" he thundered. "What law? You tarnal idiot, it's about time you were finding out who's the law around these diggin's."

Guthrie knew what he meant. The year before, when an ambitious young district attorney had caused him to be indicted for illegal fencing, the jury—

Mexicans, for the most part, who depended on him for their living, as well as their lives—had promptly acquitted him. A few weeks later the ambitious young attorney's disappearance caused strange rumors in the valley.

Now he was leaving it all, and was going down beyond the Rio Grande to work with a gang of— Yes, he knew what they were and what he was expected to do; and Jeanie knew it, too; and they both knew what the results would be. He had promised to do differently, and had worked for the little home in the valley.

And it had prospered until—Safford had become aware of his existence. Then the drought had dried up his crop, while Safford kept guard of the water that he did not need. In impotent rage he had watched his fields wither and his cattle die, while one man defied the law and ruled the Pelonco Valley.

The memories of those days surged bitterly through his brain as his horse plowed wearily to the southward.

At home, on the little ranch, a lonely woman wrung her hands and prayed.

"Oh, Heaven," she murmured, "don't let him get back there! You can't—you won't do it! Don't let him join the gang!"

And so she pleaded hysterically, her eyes wide with agony, until her voice died in her throat, while two curly-headed boys of four clung to her skirts in open-eyed astonishment.

11.

OUT on the desert the wind began to rise, making the shifting sand-grains give forth faint, ominous whispers as they rose in the gathering darkness. Then the rain began to fall—the rain

that had been withheld for weary months. But Guthrie struggled on, unmindful of the storm. The tempest, raging within, made him insensible to mere physical discomfort.

Over and over in his mind tumbled pictures of Jeanie and the twins—Jeanie, with her beseeching eyes, and the boys playing in the sun as he rode away to make arrangements to move from the little home that they had struggled so hard to obtain.

With such insistency did the pictures claim his attention that he was unconscious of the violence of the downpour until he reached the Sauz, which—generally dry—was now a raging mountain torrent. He pulled up and looked with dismay on the flood. It would be madness to try to cross it. Logs and brush were thickly entangled in the foaming waters. Man or beast would stand little chance of ever gaining the other shore.

For long, he sat there and watched the brown waters as they hurled themselves madly onward. Ever and anon the lightning lit the frowning scene into barbaric splendor.

Finally he began to exult at the fierce attitude of Nature; the fury and violence seemed to emanate from his own breast—she seemed only to reecho his pent-up curses against fate and man, and the wild, barren land that could only be conquered by an abundance of this precious fluid that was being recklessly wasted—wasted to mock human effort.

The sight of this, for which he had been willing to sell his soul, was turning his brain. He threw his arms above his head and uttered fierce curses, intermingled with prayers. Nature so pitiless—by turns so lavish and then so penurious—confounded him.

"Heavens!" he cried. "For lack of this I'm breaking Jeanie's heart—going back to the old life—and here you're throwing enough of it down at once—just clum wastin' it, to make—"

But he did not finish the thought. A dazzling flash of lightning revealed a man on the opposite shore, who urged a jaded horse to try the torrent. The flash was quick; but in that instant he recognized Safford, who was probably returning from a business trip down at the lower end of the valley.

Another, and yet another, flash showed him still on the other side. His steed snorted and reared far back on its haunches, refusing to attempt the deadly tide. Guthrie imagined that he could hear Safford's fierce curses as he cruelly jerked the bridle and drove his spurs into the side of his resisting steed.

"Great Heavens! He's drunker than a lord, or he'd never attempt it." Guthrie muttered under his breath.

When the next flash lit up the scene he saw Safford in the flood. A gnarled pine, caught probably high up on some mountainside, was swiftly bearing down upon him, its twisted roots stretching toward him like the writhing arms of some giant octopus.

The next flash revealed him caught in their embrace. His horse gave a side-wise plunge and escaped, making his way quickly to the shore.

Meanwhile, Guthrie stood with fascinated eyes and watched the storm work. But, as the knotty arms caught Safford, he gave a shrill shriek of glee.

"Curse you!" he cried. "Fence it in—fence it in and keep it all for yourself. Now, you have plenty of it. Drink it, and let your neighbors starve! And may your soul be then satisfied with it!"

The next flash disclosed him clinging to the central radical, while the tree was slowly righting itself, pushing him down under a cage-like spread of roots. His eyes were wild. The fluid, which he had so religiously guarded from any intruder in the Pelonco Valley, was engulfing and strangling him, while it wildly caressed him and sang weird songs in his ears. Guthrie saw his hands disappear from view during a vivid flash; then followed such an ominous roar of thunder that he was startled in terror. Was Nature going to punish him for jeering at a drowning man?

"Heavens," he cried, "I couldn't help it! He always did get it all!"

Slowly the last lingering echo of the storm died away; the moon peeped shyly from behind the clouds, and the drenched figure, turning slowly homeward, became himself again.

Far before him, galloped a riderless horse on the solitary desert.

THE LITTLE LADY OF THE WINDOW.

BY GEORGE HENRY ELLERTON.

A SHORT STORY.



I HAVE led a very lonely life. Forty-five years ago I started out in the world with ambitions that ate up the days and the greater part of the nights in a vain effort to be appeased. Life was a zither from which my labor tore the sweetest songs—the song of hope, of endeavor, of things accomplished. I must tell you of those days. The little vagrant puffs of air that frolicked beside me as I swung down Broadway on spring mornings whispered of places among the mighty, and I tossed a glove at the Fates and laughed at my own impertinence.

Then something went wrong. It's curious how a man's aggressiveness will leave him suddenly. You've heard how one of those oil-wells, with a phenomenal flow, will go dry in a single night? Well—ah! what's the use of fishing for similes?

I lost my grip, slipped, stumbled; made an effort to recover, only to fall heavier, and then Carmelin—I am sure it was Carmelin, although he shook his head when I muttered my thanks—got me the position I hold to-day. I write advertisements for the Beckwith-Patterson Company, and whenever I stop to consider whether old Sam Beckwith has done the fair thing to me, or whether I have done the fair thing to Sam Beckwith, I take particular pains to make the next advertisement I write something better than the ordinary—and that will tell you that Beckwith is not the worst fellow in the world.

When I moved up-town, in the beginning of last year, it was the view that induced me to take the rear rooms on the sixth floor of the Errington. From the windows I looked out over the roofs of the houses that lay between me and the

Hudson, and the skyscape instantly attracted me.

I like a skyscape when I go idea-hunting, and I thought that many a good peg on which to hang the merits of a canned delicacy might be lassoed between my windows and the Jersey horizon.

I said I looked out over the roofs, and so I did; but, from one window of the room that I converted into a study, I could look down into a long ravine, the work of an ingenious architect who had backed two rows of terrace houses so closely together that only a sunbeam in a perpendicular attitude could pierce the gulch separating the rear flats.

The ravine interested me, and I drew my desk to the window which commanded a view of its depths. By narrowing my eyes so that I eliminated the fire-escapes and other inartistic details, I received an occasional thrill by surprising myself into the belief that I was standing on the brink of the Grand Cañon.

The occupants of those rear flats didn't seem any way incensed against the architect who had planned the pit of gloom. I think those on the upper floors silently applauded his action. The nearness of the banks of brick made it possible to string clothes-lines from one side of the chasm to the other, and the network of rope across the ravine proved that the occupants of the flats erected their lines on principles of reciprocity.

I had been in my new home three days when I discovered my Little Lady of the Window. Why I didn't discover her on the first or second day is a mystery to me even now. Perhaps I was trying to get too many thrills out of the depths beneath me, and unwittingly shut her out with the fire-escapes and the pots of flowers, which, in utter defiance of the penalty, cumbered the iron platforms.

She was sitting at a top window in one of the tall rows, and as the rear walls of the Errington formed the end of the cañon, her window was only some ten feet from my point of observation and about three feet lower in the matter of elevation.

I don't think any one can grow too old to admire a pretty woman. I have not, and I am in the shadow of the scriptural span. But the Little Lady of the Window was more than pretty. Mere prettiness doesn't attract me. The Beckwith-Patterson people had a classical scholar once who wrote the finest-worded copy that we ever had, but it didn't suit old Sam.

"It's sodden," he said one day when the classical fellow had turned out a long strip of it. "I want stuff that the very soul in it shines through all the little spaces between the words and fairly warns you at the breaks between the paragraphs."

That's the way I judge a woman's looks. One shouldn't rave about the line of a nose or the flow of a sentence, unless there is something under the mere method of expression. That was how it was with the little girl at the top window. The soul shone through her wonderfully white face, and one felt its warmth in a mere glance.

Her brown hair was coiled simply around her head, and the little hands that moved nimbly over her embroidery were like two bewitched blossoms of the cyclamen that stood near her.

There were other flowers in the cozy window-seat in which she sat—red poinsettias, Chinese primroses, and begonias—but in my mind the cyclamen took its place as her flower.

But, there—I'm an old fool! It wasn't the blossoms altogether. I had seen a thousand cyclamens since the day I dropped out of the ranks of the doers, and not one of them had closed up the gap of forty-five years and swept me back to the days when the spring breezes, nosing along Broadway, urged me to get up and drive the universe.

II.

I WASN'T surprised when he came. There are times when we know, intuitively, that we are going to play a hand in

some game for which Fate has not even prepared the rules; and when I saw him sitting at a window on the opposite side of the cañon, and in a direct line with the one at which she sat, I blessed the impulse which had made me quarter myself in the Errington.

Here were the looms of the Fates weaving underneath my window, and using me, perchance, to tie the flying ends of thread when a bobbin ran out!

Old Sam Beckwith was surprised with the copy I turned in during those days of early spring. I twisted feathery fancies around breakfast-foods and canned delicacies till the old man wondered. Well, well, he might not have understood if I had told him what was responsible for the improvement. Brown hair coiled closely above a little haunting face—and cyclamen. Oh, yes, cyclamen! What a simple recipe to make an old man throw mental somersaults over an abyss forty-five years wide!

It's good to be gray-headed at times. Those two saw me at my desk biting my penholder and staring down the ravine toward the Jersey shore during my idealess moments, but they grew so accustomed to my near presence that they took no notice. That was as it should be.

It was very quiet in our end of the gulch during those spring afternoons, and I wrote some famous advertisements while watching them unobtrusively. You would remember a few of the E.-P. Company's business grappling-irons that I manufactured during that period if I gave your memory a little shake.

It stirred my blood to see that gay young rascal—he was the son I had dreamed of forty-five years before—attract the attention of the girl opposite, and when the color stole up her face I laughed with joy. Why shouldn't I be pleased? Then she'd return his look with a shy little glance which pricked me like the point of a rapier. Ho-ho, cyclamen and brown hair and little white fingers—fingers that kneaded forty-five years of suffering into a fragment so small that I hopped over it every time I looked in her direction.

Well, well, I'm a foolish old fellow, but I thought that little romance had been arranged beneath my window as a sort of recompense for those dead years.

What does Emerson say: "Crime and punishment grow on the one stalk." Assuredly! So do suffering and joy. The hand that plucks the one will gather the other, if it waters the root with hope. Then, I was wiser than either of those two.

Didn't I see her come to the window each afternoon just a few minutes before he came home from his office, making the pretense, of course, that she had been sitting there for hours? Then when she went away somewhere during the day, didn't I see him sitting at his window, watching hungrily across the gulf? I couldn't shut my eyes.

Destiny had sat me there above the gap which separated them—I, the old man with a somersaulting mind and a Grand Cañon of misery between my own youthful dreams and the gray days of old age, into which a little reflected light was filtering.

I knew I had been placed there to tie a loose thread when the shears clipped one unwittingly. That young rascal wasn't content with exchanging looks across the gulch. One afternoon in April he gave me a start by climbing out on his window-sill and swinging himself up to the platform of the fire-escape directly above his head.

I sprang up and leaned out of the window, and when I glanced around I saw her white, terror-stricken face pressed forward between the pots of red-leaved poinsettias and Jerusalem cherries. It made me angry with him.

"Young man," I said sternly, as he stood looking at me with a smile on his frank face. "if you are an acrobat, I wish you would rehearse with less atmosphere between your worthless body and the ground. Your tricks affect my nerves and the nerves of other people."

He was a good-tempered boy. He laughed heartily at my rebuke, while the white face among the greenery was withdrawn hastily at the remark about the nerves of other people.

Then, as he stood there fumbling with the clothes-line that ran from the platform of the fire-escape to a pulley placed in the wall near my little lady's window, I understood his motive, and, blushing much, I pulled my head inside.

A man becomes very stupid when he is

in the shadow of the seventies. That young sprig was pinning a message to the line, intending, of course, to pull it across to her window by means of the pulley.

Fate had the one-line part ready for me at that moment. When the little shivering note was half-way across the ravine, the rope got caught in the pulley, and the youngster couldn't move it. Ho-ho! How cunningly I was plaited into the piece! Chance, you say? Not it! There is no such thing as chance.

I laughed quietly as I heard him tugging. Ah, it was fun to hear the young blood muttering about the contrariness of clothes-lines! At last I peeped up cautiously from my desk, and he caught my eye.

"Say," he cried, speaking as unconcernedly as if he was addressing a friend across the dinner-table, "have you got a stick that you could lift that rope with? It's off the pulley, and I can't shift it."

I am sixty-five, mind you, and I suppose that boy had just one-third of that number of years to his credit; but he stood there and asked my help as coolly as if I were a companion of his own age. Still, I knew that it was my little part in the play.

"One moment," I answered; "I'll fix it for you."

I dashed into my sitting-room, grasped my malacca cane that has the gold-embossed crook, and then I rushed back to the window, upsetting the waste-basket in my nervous haste.

"Easy, easy," cautioned the boy, as I made frantic attempts to release the rope, "or you'll knock the paper off."

I chuckled over the impudence of the rascal.

"Get the hook under the rope," he ordered. "Now, then, lift it easy—there, that's it. Much thanks for your trouble."

I was quite flushed and excited as I sat down to my desk. Mind you, I am not the sort of man that a boy of twenty would take liberties with; but I remembered other days of my own. I guess I would have done the same. But the way he cautioned me against knocking that little bit of paper off—and I old enough to be his grandfather!

Old Sam Beckwith complimented me upon the work I turned out about that

time. He said my copy had yeast in it. Yeast! I guess it had! Sam has a sharp eye for anything good, and my stuff was as feathery as a first snowfall. The whine of that pulley as it carried a rosebud or a candy, or a little note across the Grand Cañon beneath my window had a peculiar effect upon my work. Yet, there are narrow-minded people who think they owe nothing to others!

It was about the end of April when I met them together for the first time. The clothes-line had finished its duties long before that, and turned over the job of carrying the correspondence to Uncle Sam.

But the glow around the end of the gulch made my copy "come off the paper and grip hold of the reader," as old Sam used to say.

I met them on the Riverside Drive. It was one of those swoony afternoons in spring, when the tropic breezes have chased the north winds into their fastnesses and the earth sighs in sweet contentment.

I saw her whisper to him as they came toward me, and he smiled. What a dainty little lady she looked, while he—why, that boy walked like an undefeated gladiator!

He bowed with the grace of a Chesterfield, while her sweet little smile put a golden veneer over the old Hudson as I turned aside. Cyclamen and brown hair; eh? Ah, yes, and a smile that was twin to that other—the one that made the spring breezes whisper of planets to drive and worlds to conquer forty-five years ago.

It's the little things in life that are caught in the reticule of the mind. That girl lifted her hand to gather in a stray lock of hair as she passed me by, and the action made me feel for a moment that I had been struck by a brickbat thrown from the roof of one of the tall apartment-houses near by.

III.

AFTER that I met them regularly when I went for my afternoon stroll. You cannot imagine how I came to watch for them. Didn't I release the line when it caught in the pulley as the first message of love was shivering across the Grand Cañon? Bless my heart, what a fool a

man becomes in his semidotage! I was so proud of my little part that, as I waited at the end of Lovers' Walk for them to pass by, I felt inclined to chatter of my deeds with the gold-embossed stick to an old army captain who shared my seat in the embrasure!

It was in the first week of June that the youngster spoke to me. Bless me, how my heart did pound when I saw him alone! The captain was laid up with gout that evening, and the boy sat down on the seat and started to talk as if I was his confidant for years. People in love have more intuition than others, and that youth felt that I took an interest in their courtship.

Interest? Yes. He knew nothing of those spring days long ago before the aggressiveness left me!

We sat there till the moon got tired of looking at her reflection in the water, and then we walked up the silent driveway. He was a frank child, and my heart went out to him.

"It's all up," he said gloomily, as we neared the Errington; "everything is over between us."

I tried to smile at his solemn manner, but a feeling of dread tore the smile from my face. If it had come to an end so soon, why had I been placed midway in the Grand Cañon to tie the loose ends? "Ends," I murmured; "yes, but I have only tied one."

Then, as my mind tried to take soundings, the boy went on with his gloomy mutterings.

"I'm going away on Wednesday," he said; "I'm all packed, ready."

I looked at him, and he nodded his head.

Wednesday was but two days away.

"For where?" I asked.

"Cleveland," he answered. "You don't think I could—" Then he broke off, and turned his head away. He had the heart of a girl. I left him an hour later and went to my bed, wondering.

Then came a soft afternoon in June, with chiffon clouds and a sleepy sun. The ravine was full of a soft, rosy glow when the boy climbed out on his window-sill, as he did in the first days of the courtship, and I watched him as he scrambled up to the fire-escape.

Yes, it was my plan. I wanted him to

send her a box of flowers in the old way. I thought the whine of that pulley going across the ravine would stir memories.

I'm an old fool on memories—still, I had hopes. In between the red-leaved poinsettias I thought I caught a glimpse of a white face—and I waited.

Here again the wise persons will talk about chance. 'Chance!' As if anything has ever happened without design! That rope came off the pulley once more, and the box of Maréchal Niels swung idly in space, indifferent to the boy's fierce tugs.

I rushed for my stick, as I had done one evening weeks before, and I hooked frantically at the rope. 'Chance! Scream it once again. My old, half-palsied hands refused to hold the stick, and down it went through the depths to the paved yard below. I sprang back in terror.

The wild twirling of the stick as it dived into space made me giddy, and my brain reeled as I clutched the window-frame. Just at that instant I caught a glimpse of the white face among the poinsettias, which seemed wreathed in smiles brought there by my misfortune.

I stood for a minute back from the window, till I recovered my balance, then a low scream of terror compelled me to look out.

Hanging to the rope, and moving forward hand over hand toward the box of roses, was the boy!

It was her scream that I heard. Her arms had crushed aside the flowers and were held out to him, straining to reach him across the gulf. I became sick with horror—I, who had asked him to send the roses by the line, the line that creaked and groaned as if threatening him with the awful drop!

My finger-nails tore the cedar panels. The madman! Even now my brain reels

as the picture comes up before me. He reached the box, and, pushing it forward with his hands, kept on his way toward my little lady's window.

I recovered myself a trifle at that moment. Stupidly I thought that I would be in time to help pull him inside if the rope did not break, and I dashed bare-headed down the stairs, around the corner, and up the steep flights leading to the top floor of the house in which the brown-haired girl lived. Conscience knifed me as I ran. I had urged him to send the flowers by the line, and I had dropped my stick when it was needed.

Blind instinct led me to the right door. I dashed through the little hall into the sitting-room, stopping with a cry of joy.

That mad daredevil was seated on the window-sill with his legs inside the room, and the head of my Little Lady of the Window was pillowed on his breast.

He smiled when he saw me, and then he held up a warning finger. A pot of cyclamen had rolled near the door when she had pulled it away to make room for his entry, and I plucked nervously at a flower as I turned quietly.

Cyclamen and brown hair! Ah, if I had acted as boldly forty-five years ago, I might have filled my Grand Cañon of misery with days of happiness!

Old Sam Beckwith increased my salary the following week. I turned in that famous advertisement that created the boom in Carrington's Cherubim Crackers.

"That's the sort of copy a man writes when he is pleased with the whole world," said Beckwith. "It has that soul in it that shines through the little spaces between the words."

Old Sam Beckwith is a shrewd man, and his judgment is seldom wrong.

THE MOON AND THE TOWER.

THE moon upclimbed behind the tower,
Seemed in the sky to poise a space,
While through the windows like a flower
Peered its appealing face.

"What seek you there, O Lady Moon?
What seek you there, O peerless one?"
"I search"—thus ran the whispered rune—
"For lost Endymion!"

Sennett Stephens.

D A D D Y.

BY PERCY M. CUSHING.

A SHORT STORY.



HE snow was whirling through the streets when I hurried up the broad steps of the station. The big waiting-room was heavy with the odor of damp clothing, and filled with a varied throng of humanity. As usual, I was late for my train. In my haste I slipped, caught myself, and bumped head first into a woman, knocking a satchel and umbrella from her grasp, and upsetting a sunny-haired little girl of four years she held by the hand.

With a muttered apology and an inward sense of annoyance, I picked up the youngster, groped for the umbrella, which had rolled away, saw half a dozen people squeeze ahead of me in the line at the ticket-window, and realized that the train might have gone an hour before, as far as I was concerned.

With what was very bad grace, I turned toward the woman, holding out the umbrella and satchel. She accepted them and raised her eyes quickly—and it seemed almost suspiciously—to mine. She was a woman of perhaps thirty or thirty-five. There was a trace of faded beauty about her tired face—a hint of beauty grown hard. A dab of unnatural color that seemed out of place, made a pitiful attempt to conceal the lines of care on her cheeks. Her hair was light and curly like that of the child. Only her eyes distinguished her from the host of weary-faced women one sees daily on the streets of the great city. They were ordinary eyes of undecided brown, a trifle heavy, perhaps, but in the hurried glance they shot into my face was a strange, fearful glitter, a look that might have made me question her sanity at a time when I was less annoyed.

These observations were the work of my subconscious mind, and they might have remained in oblivion, but for what happened later. I was turning away when a man hurried up to her from the crowd that choked the waiting-room.

"You're late," he snarled. "We've missed the train." His coarse face was livid.

Something in his tone took hold of me, and I listened for her reply.

"I couldn't help it. The baby had to have her support." Her voice was low and hoarse.

"Oh, darn your brat. If you don't want its father on top of us, you'd better move."

She did not reply, but shot a fearful glance toward the doors that opened on the train-platforms. Somehow, I felt as though I had been looking behind the scenes of a drama of real life, and, though my conscience troubled me for an instant, I did not walk away, but turned my back and began searching my pockets for an imaginary object.

I could not hear the rest of their conversation, but presently they moved away and I followed. When we had passed through the swinging doors to the platform, I found that they were going on the train which I intended to take. I followed them out between the long lines of cars, the woman clinging to the man's sleeve with one hand and dragging the child with the other.

The car we entered was old and dingy. The dim light of the gas-lamps accentuated the pallor of the woman's face, which was apparent despite the efforts of the rouge to conceal it. I dropped into a seat directly behind them. The man turned over the seat ahead of him and the woman sat facing me. Few

people took the late train, and there were scarcely a dozen in the car when we pulled out. Directly across the aisle from the woman with the child, sat an old lady with gray hair and a sweet, sad face. It seemed to me that her eyes must have been like those of the mother whom I had never seen.

The man and woman in front of me conversed in low tones. Occasionally I caught a few scattered words, but the main drift of their conversation was lost in the rumble of the train. The child held tightly to its mother's dress, its curly little head nestled close against the threadbare sleeve of her worn jacket. At one of the suburban stations we stopped with a jerk. The door at the forward end of the car burst open, admitting a gust of cold air and a flurry of snow. A brakeman ran hurriedly through.

"Trouble up ahead. We'll be delayed ten minutes," I heard him say.

II.

THE woman turned an anxious face to the man.

"What station is it, Jim?" she asked.

Jim rubbed the mist from the window-pane and peered through the drifting snow.

"It's Mount Vernon," he exclaimed, swearing, "and he takes the seven-forty back every night. It's seven-thirty now."

The woman stifled a cry and sank back, pale and trembling.

"Jim," she whispered, "Jim, go out and see if he's around."

"Yes, and get caught," muttered the man. There was a brief silence, broken by the sifting of snow against the windows, the hiss of escaping steam, and out of the darkness, the mingling of hoarse voices and clanging bells. The man got up and stepped to the forward door. The woman drew her cloak closer, cowering in the seat, as her red hand tightened its hold on the child's arm. The little one turned her big eyes up to her mother's face.

"Ethel is tiwed. Ethel wan' go home," she lisped.

"Hush," warned the mother quickly.

"Pese tate Ethel home." The baby's voice was insistent.

The woman glanced nervously out of the dark square of window. The electric lights on the platform shone dull and uncertain in the falling snow.

"Mommie," begged the little voice plaintively, "tate me home to daddy. Where is daddy?"

Alarm came to the woman's face.

"Be quiet," she whispered hoarsely. "Your father is outside, he'll be back in a minute."

Perplexity struggled to the little face.

"Jim not Ethel's daddy. Jim mean to me," she said.

The old lady across the aisle had been watching the scene that was going on in the seat ahead of me. The conversation had been loud enough for her to hear. As I looked across at her, I thought I saw a sad, wistful light come into her face.

At the last entreaty of the child, she caught impulsively at the folds of her dress, one hand moved forward and rested on the seat ahead of her. She hesitated a moment, then slipped quickly across the aisle.

Her back was toward me so that I could not see her face. Her bonnet hid the countenance of the other woman. The conversation was too low for me to hear. Perhaps I did not have the courage to listen as I had done before. Instinctively I turned away, and when I looked again the old lady had slipped back to her own seat.

Mechanically I glanced at the other woman. A strange change had come across her. Something resembling a tear glistened in her eyes, and her mouth was set. She was reaching for her satchel and umbrella. In a moment she was on her feet with the child held closely in her arms. She looked swiftly toward the forward door through which the man had gone, then hurried to the rear of the car. There was a gust of cold wind—a whirl of snowflakes and she was gone.

I opened the window and looked out. For an instant, in the falling snow, I saw a woman with a child in her arms hesitating as though uncertain what to do. Then the question was unexpectedly answered for her.

There was a sudden movement in the crowd on the platform, a quick step, a bound, and woman and child were lifted

high in the arms of a big, rough, kind-faced man.

Those strange lulls come sometimes in the very height of the storm. The wind suddenly fell to a whisper, the drifting flakes seemed to fall more softly and silently, and for an instant the voices on the platform were distinctly audible.

"Why, Nell, old girl, I didn't think you'd come to meet me in this blizzard."

The man's voice was husky with emotion, and though I could not see his eyes, I knew they were shining. An instant the woman faltered; then she lifted her face to his. It was glorified!

Her reply was lost in the roar of the wind, as with renewed violence it sent a

gust of snow into my window. While I fumbled with the catch the train lurched ahead and I turned too late for a final glimpse of the scene.

The forward door of the car opened and the man I had first seen with the woman, entered. He looked blankly at the empty seat. Amazement struggled with incredulity in his hard face—then came understanding and rage. The train was gathering headway. With a leap he reached the rear platform. Signal lights were slipping rapidly past while the walls of night closed in behind. The man turned and slunk into a seat.

Across the aisle an old lady smiled softly to herself.

EVENTIDE.

If eventide came on alone,

And in my little, circled space

No eyes looked tender into mine,

And searched all eagerly my face,

How weary would be time and place!

If dusky mists descended gray,

And never hand caressing fell

Upon my own to give me cheer,

What dreary tales the years could tell,

When they at last rang out my knell!

If lengthened shadows crept and crept,

And I stood watching them alone,

I'd beg of God to loose my soul

And send it out to realms unknown,

In search of you, my own, my own!

And nightly I, with bated breath,

Do frame a prayer for thee and me,

Lest by some melancholy chance

The Maker should o'erlook my plea,

And send the dusk alone to me!

Lilla B. N. Weston.

MILDRED, THE MISANTHROPE.

BY ANNE STORY ALLEN.

A SHORT STORY.



WHEN Mildred was young—so young that she did not know the difference between a man and a cub—she was treated rather badly. Her fiancé suddenly married some one else, leaving behind him only the briefest of notes and a few inconsequent gifts to mark his trail.

Mildred's family was divided in opinion as to the affair. Her father thought it a good thing, and did not hesitate to say so.

Her mother, with the trousseau half finished on her hands, and a younger and prettier daughter clamoring for social recognition, wept sorrowfully. The table-linen, she decided, and all the embroidered supplies, would not be an actual loss, because, after a decent interval, they could be added to the household stock and made use of. But the garments for Mildred's wear—even the wedding-gown itself was partly finished—were the main cause of her lamentations.

"Burn them up," shouted Mildred's father, his gout being very bad that day—"burn them up, and let me hear the last of it."

Of course, they were not burned up. Instead, they were laid in tissue-paper shrouds; and Mildred, for years after, associated a certain perfume with young, vague hopes that had been put away in the guest-room wardrobe, where her unused trousseau sent forth a sweet odor from sachets her own clumsy fingers had made.

Mildred was at this time a tall, pale creature, who, under favorable conditions, might have blossomed to more than ordinary good looks. The youth had likened her to a lily, and Mildred cher-

ished the happy thought till it—with the rest of Mildred's new things—suddenly became old and useless.

Mildred's sister, Josephine, dark-eyed, and crowned with a mop of dusky hair, was openly disgusted at the turn affairs had taken. She had no mind to retire any longer from the public view in order that her elder sister might have what was elegantly termed in the family "another chance."

Once, Mildred found her dressed up in one of the wedding-garments, and topped by a big plumed hat, bridling and posing before a mirror. Then fire entered into Mildred's veins. She tore the gown from her sister's back, dragged the hat from her head, and, hurling the half-clad figure from the room, locked the door behind her.

The father laughed when he heard the story—laughed at the sight of his wife's consternation and at his younger daughter's rage.

"I'd have done the same," was all they could get from him. Then, his mirth dying suddenly, he turned on his audience with severity.

"Let this be the last of the whole thing," he cried, and banged the table.

It was a way he had—banging the table. For Mildred's father, ill with gout and temper, sat in his sunny library, and flung harsh words, and even more material weapons, at such persons as dared approach him unbidden.

But from this time on he flung nothing at Mildred. In an awkward way he tried to be friends with her. He never alluded to her unfortunate love-affair except once, and then he put his big, stiff-jointed hand over her little white one, and said hoarsely:

"You've got your life before you, my

girl. Make something of it." Then he leaned back and groaned, and Mildred thought it was the groan of gout.

Possibly, if Mildred's father had lived—thorny and belated as his affection for his daughter was—Mildred might have recognized the spirit of love struggling against all kinds of odds and trying to come to its own. But one day the specter stood suddenly at the side of his big leather chair, and, unlovely and unloved, Mildred's father bowed his head and drew his last breath.

His widow clothed herself in a great deal of crape, and Josephine wore dull jet in intricate designs upon her mourning gowns. Mildred, with wide, questioning eyes, and a strange loneliness driving her restlessly about the quiet house, put on the black frocks they brought her.

She looked very ugly in them, and no one cared enough to tell her to put a band of white at her throat. She strained her hair in a high, tight roll, and no one put out a caressing hand to pull a few shadowy locks about her temples.

Josephine ordered her mourning lavishly while waiting for the estate to be settled.

To her sister's wrath and her mother's bewilderment, it was found that the will left as much to Mildred as to the other two together.

"To my daughter Mildred, for good reasons of my own, I give half my estate." And then followed certain iron-clad terms that made the breaking of the will undesirable.

A few months later, Mildred was invited, in a perfunctory and hope-you-won't-go manner, to accompany her mother and sister to Europe. She declined, looking homelier than ever at the moment in a collarless blouse of dull black.

Josephine remarked to her mother feelingly, in the privacy of Josephine's room, that it was a blessing that Mildred hadn't taken it into her head to go, because she would only be a drag and a nuisance. The mother agreed, with a heavy sigh, and Mildred overheard, having hastened after them to reconsider her decision.

She caught sight of Josephine, through the partly opened door, ruffling her dark

locks before her dressing-table, and she heard her remark quite feelingly:

"Doesn't it seem strange, mama, that she is your daughter and my sister?"

So Mildred did not reconsider her decision.

A month later saw her mother and sister wave good-by from the high deck of a Mediterranean steamer. Not a tear dimmed her eye nor dampened the handkerchief she waved in response; but a terrible loneliness settled down upon her as she got into the carriage and drove home again.

In a few days she had discharged the housekeeper, who had been left as a sort of chaperon, cleared the house of servants and furniture, closed it, and, with two trunks and a hand-bag, boarded a train for a small country town, where, for one summer, she had been sent as a child.

She found the same boarding-place; the same narrow veranda wriggled around the house; the same lopsided elm stood in the yard; the same woman cooked the same dishes; and Mildred crept, with a sigh of relief, into the same room that she had occupied fifteen years before.

II.

LOOKING back, Mildred felt her life seemed to have moved slowly. But from the pounded and beaten feeling that possessed her, mentally and physically, the years, she thought, must have passed in a series of leaps and bounds, bringing events in their train that had crushed the very soul of her.

Her bashful girlhood, her brief courtship, her sudden betrothal—and then she had stood alone! Hostility, both active and passive, was about her. There was only her father's belated championship to lend a momentary anchorage to her rudderless, battered little ship of life.

Then that anchor was cut loose, and only some money—hard, cold, enemy-inviting dollars—stood between her and utter shipwreck.

She hated everybody and everything with an intensity that had come from slow and unconscious growth. The people and things she hated least were about her in this humdrum village. She felt that, even when heads drew together

when she had passed by, and voices stilled as she came to the common dining-table, that it was the gossip of curiosity, rather than a conscious exclusion of her; and her hatred was tinged with a kind of tolerance.

One night she laughed at the table. A young girl, a music-teacher in the village, made a mild, kindly flavored joke, and Mildred, leaning forward unexpectedly, laughed.

She was more surprised than any of them. Their stares and her painful blushes brought silence, and the meal was finished awkwardly.

It was a warm night, and from the next room to Mildred's a young voice floated out.

"I don't believe she's a misanthrope at all. I believe she would be pleased to like people and laugh and have a good time, only she doesn't know how."

Mildred felt her eyes suddenly grow wet. She pushed the tears carefully back with her handkerchief, and looked at herself in the mirror.

"No," she said aloud, "I don't know how. And I don't want to know how," she finished deliberately.

Ugly lines came about her mouth. She stooped and took from a drawer two pictures in leather frames. She sat down and looked at them intently.

"They know by now," she said, "that I never want to see them again."

The worried little negative face of her mother stared at her. There was nothing in its gaze to melt the daughter's heart. But she laid it aside for the other.

Josephine's dark eyes looked out boldly.

"Sister," whispered Mildred—"my only sister!"

The ugly lines in her face deepened.

"Sweet, pleasant, helpful sister," she murmured. She slipped the photograph from its frame, tore it carefully into four pieces, and these again into fine bits.

There was no anger in her movements—only a quiet finality.

Then she did the same with the picture of her mother; but she held the blank side of the cardboard toward her, and her face broke a little from its stony calm.

With her scissors she cut the frames

into useless fragments and put them in her waste-basket. Then she walked to the window and breathed a long sigh.

"A misanthrope!" she said. "I always thought they were old men who hid their money and counted it when no one was looking. That's a miser, probably. I am ignorant, as well as—what that girl said. But, at least, there's one thing. I am my own mistress. No one can say to me any longer 'Do this' or 'Do that.' If I believed there was a God, I'd thank Him for that; but as I don't, I'll keep my thanks to myself. Now I'll go to bed. To-morrow I am going to hunt for a place to live in."

III.

It was an old farmhouse. Its eels were at strange angles, and one or two of them looked as if they were tired and wanted to lie down. The front yard was deserted as Mildred walked up a lonely, weedy walk toward a small, peak-roofed porch.

"It looks dilapidated," she told herself; "but it stands by itself. There would be no prying neighbors."

She looked at the small brown sign that had attracted her: "For Sale or To Rent." It was nailed to one of the columns of the porch, obviously home-made, pathetically fitted to the house it advertised.

The afternoon sun struck aslant the small-paned windows, giving temporary life and light to the empty front rooms. A straggling honeysuckle-vine stretched its green and scented length around the porch-rail and up a battered wire netting. But the bees hummed drowsily, a gentle breeze stirred the honeysuckle leaves, and the place, in spite of its shabbiness, spelled the word "home."

"I'll buy it," said Mildred to herself. "I wonder if there's a caretaker here."

She followed a side path and reached the back of the house just as the door opened and an old man came out. A big syringa-bush hid Mildred from his view.

His voice rose in protest as he sat down in a green rocker that squeaked and lurched treacherously.

"Gol darn it!" he quavered. "'Tain't fit to set in." The chair tipped back again. "An' I wish the hull kit

and caboodle, house and all, was sold, and we was on our way to the poor-h'us. We can't get a cent out'n it, any-way, an' this cheer— Dod blast it!" He caught at the arms and attempted to rise.

"There, father, you forgot the stick o' wood."

A tiny old lady stood in the open doorway. She looked about her short-sightedly.

"There it is!" She pounced on a stick of fire-wood, stuck it deftly under one of the contrary rockers, and patted the old man on the shoulder. "Always was a bit fussy about your cheers, wa'n't you, father? What's that you said just now about the poorh'us? We haven't come to it yet, and somehow—"

She stopped and caught her breath. The old man looked around at her quickly, suspiciously.

"What did you stop for? 'Somehow'—what?"

The old lady summoned a discouraged little smile. Then it spread over her wrinkled features and warmed the faded blue eyes.

"Somehow, I don't believe we'll ever go. Something seems to tell me—"

"Huh! Tells you nothing. Tells you nothing. Something's always a telling you something."

"And ain't it told me right?" asked his wife quickly.

He put out a gnarled old hand and patted hers.

"Yes," he said gently. "Yes, Susan, it always has. But I git worried some. Why don't something tell me, too?" he smiled up at her.

"'Cause I can tell you, I s'pose," she replied. Then she trotted down the steps toward the syringa-bush. "My, they do smell sweet," she called back to him.

Then Mildred came into view, and the old lady gave a little shriek.

"I saw the sign. I want to buy a home," said Mildred.

The old lady's hand fluttered up to her heart.

"Now?" she asked. "I mean, right away?"

"Yes," said Mildred.

"Come up to the house. Father's setting there. He'll tell you about it."

She led the way back to the porch. The old man peered out from under bushy eyebrows at Mildred.

"Here's a lady, father, thinks she wants to buy the place."

"I do want to buy it," corrected Mildred.

The old man looked at her from head to foot. Then he looked at his wife.

"I ain't quite decided to sell," he said.

"Father!" panted the old lady.

"I want time to think it over, mother," he quavered.

"We've got to, father," She wrung her hands nervously.

"You see, Miss—"

"My name is Mildred Trent."

"Miss Trent, we want to sell the place; but we've got to plan—to think—where we'll go."

The old man moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"Now, I guess we've said enough," he snapped. "You can go along."

"Father!" His wife pressed his shoulder warningly.

But Mildred took no offense. She looked about; the garden was ragged and unkempt, the sagging fences propped by unskilled hands, the trees unclipped. Her eyes went back to the old man. She examined him coldly.

"Can he work?"

"No; oh, no!" came from his wife.

"But I can. I'm as spry as when I was fifty. Was you thinkin'—"

"I was thinking perhaps you could take care of me. I shall live simply. Then you could both stay here; there seems to be plenty of room."

"She ain't a goin' to work for no one. Not if I—" He sank back weakly. His old eyes closed to keep back his helpless tears.

Mildred looked at him again. He was a disagreeable old man, she thought, and mentally she swept him aside. The poor soul felt it, and writhed.

"She ain't a goin'—" he began, furiously.

"Do you want to sell me the place and stay here?" Mildred asked the old lady.

The old lady's voice shook. She drew herself up with quaint dignity.

"Father and I would give anything

to stay here. We've lived here a good many years, and we'd just hate to leave it." She pressed her hand on the old man's shoulder and the speech on his lips died away. "I could look out for the place and keep you comfortable, with a woman to help me now and then with the hard part. There's lots of room in the old house. We'd not be in your way. Are you alone?"

"I'm alone—quite alone," answered Mildred. "I would like to buy this place; it pleases me. I would pay a fair price and put it in order. You could stay here, you and your husband. All I want is to be alone. If you agree, I will send my lawyer to you."

"Wouldn't you like to see the house?"

The old man moved again, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Gol darn it!" he began; but the compelling hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"Not to-day," said Mildred. "It will do, I know. It is the situation I like. You have plenty of room around you. I'll wire my lawyer to come down at once. I'd like to get settled as soon as possible. He will tell you about me, and I know you must be the Mrs. Rolfe I've heard about in the village."

"I am Mrs. Rolfe."

"And this is the old Rolfe Farm. It ain't a going to be sold!" broke out the old man.

"Shall I wire my lawyer?" asked Mildred, and Mrs. Rolfe nodded.

Mildred nodded in return, and, turning away, walked down the path around the side of the house and out of sight.

"Of all the gol darn doin's!" Mr. Rolfe's old voice shook. "What you a thinkin' of, Susan, sellin' the place to anybody that wants to walk up and say they'll buy it? How do we know she's got a cent to her name? How do we know who she is, anyway? How do we know she'll let us stay?"

The faded blue eyes of his wife looked at him.

"Father," she said. "I just said something told me we wouldn't have to go to the poorh'us. Something told me we could stay here. Now, when it comes along, just as if the Lord sent it, am I going to doubt? Am I going to ques-

tion who she is? I'm a leaving it in His hands, Gabriel, and you've got to do the same."

She dropped into a low chair by his side. She looked down the garden where the white blossoming syringa-bush moved in a gentle breeze and the green leaves of the stubby box border shone bright green in the sunlight.

"His ways are past finding out," she said after a pause. "I've prayed, and I've asked that we needn't go away; that we might end our days peaceful and quiet here on the old place. There didn't seem any way, for I couldn't see how we could get the money; and your pension's only enough to buy us food. But, 'He shall give His angels charge over thee.'"

"Didn't look much like an angel," protested the old man. "Looked more like a sour old maid to me. Hoity-toity, too! 'I'll send my lawyer.' He quavered it out in mimicry.

His wife wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. She turned toward him, and an appreciative twinkle chased the spiritual look from her eyes.

"I guess we feel alike, way down underneath," she said, "even if you do take one side and I t'other. There, I must go in. I most know the water on those potatoes has about boiled away. Well, it's settled, ain't it, father, so far?"

"I s'pose so," replied the old man; "and, of course, it might be worse."

The old lady trotted into the kitchen. Her voice rose above the rattling of kettles on the stove.

How firm a foundation,
Ye saints of the Lord—

And the old man, with a softened look on his face, tapped with his fingers on the chair-arms to the tune of the hymn.

IV.

THE Rolfe Farm continued to be known as the Rolfe Farm. Its new owner made no attempt to change its name, nor to proclaim publicly her ownership. She occupied several of the freshly papered and painted rooms. The woman who had come as a bride to Rolfe Farm brought her three simple,

well-cooked meals a day, and Mildred learned to look for the tired little old face that never failed to smile at her over the trays of good things.

The old man she rarely saw. If she wandered in the rear garden, he would, at her approach, hobble into the kitchen and peer, from behind immaculate curtains, at the tall, black-clad figure stooping over the flower-beds, and finally vanishing down the back road for a walk.

Mildred had not been ungenerous in the business of buying the farm. There remained, over and above the mortgage, enough for the old couple to feel free from care, and the clause suggested by Gabriel Rolfe provided that he and his wife should retain for life certain privileges to which she had agreed.

She paid fair wages to the old lady, practically forgot the old man, and was vaguely glad that matters had been adjusted with so little delay or trouble.

The fresh country air, the freedom, the pleasant atmosphere of the home, all combined to quiet her strained nerves. They put fresh color into her cheeks, and the light of interest in her eyes.

But nothing had softened her heart. Letters from her mother and sister she had returned, unopened. The hurt of the years that had gone healed, but the scar was deep and ugly.

"Something tells me," said the old lady one day, "that poor soul has had lots of trouble."

"So's other folks," retorted her husband.

He sat in his cushioned chair by the open kitchen window.

"Yes, I know, father, but she's young. She ain't had time to get over them. It's sad to see her looking so stern and forbidding. Something tells me that she's had a love-affair."

The old man snorted.

"It must 'a' been with a blind man, then," he chuckled.

"Father!"

The old lady would not laugh. She wrung her dish-towels and went out to spread them on the grass. Old Gabriel watched her.

"Spry as a girl," he muttered. "Ain't she a wonder, that woman? Gol darn—

there, I won't say it; she don't like to have me. But it grinds me to see her trotting about, working for that sour-faced hussy. Well, maybe, she ain't a hussy; but she's an ugly-lookin' critter."

The "ugly-lookin' critter" was at that moment turning in at the gate. A flopping hat hung back on her head, tied under her chin by a big black bow; her hair had blown loose about her fair head, and the collar of her dress was turned in.

Mrs. Rolfe looked up from spreading her towels.

"Had a nice walk?" she asked pleasantly. Then, catching sight of Mildred's face: "My, what a pretty color you've got. You look like one of them roses noddin' over there on the bush yonder."

Mildred's face flushed to a crimson.

"I—are my cheeks red?" she asked awkwardly.

"No, just pretty and pink." The old lady looked at her admiringly and spread another towel.

Mildred looked about her. "I like to live here," she said. She stretched her arms out and let them drop to her side again. It was a gesture totally foreign to her. "It's a beautiful spot," she said. "I feel better since I came."

She turned suddenly toward the old lady.

"Would you really have had to go to another place?" she asked suddenly. "Did you have to sell this?"

Mrs. Rolfe picked up the basket, and her withered hands tightened on the handles.

"I ain't complaining. But father's been ailing for some years back, and the farm ain't paid. You see, it has to be coaxed, this land does. It did for us all along when we were younger; then it got neglected, and it wanted good food—same as folks—and men to look out for it. So you see, it was just a home, not a real farm any longer, and things kind of looked pretty bad. But they're all right now—since you came."

"Since I came?"

A sudden light leaped into Mildred's eyes. Then it died away.

"Oh, you mean since I bought the place?"

"Yes," said the old lady.

Mildred turned to the house.

"Can I have my luncheon soon?" she asked.

"Of course: yes, indeed."

Mrs. Rolfe hurried into the house, and Mildred went around to the front porch. She sank down in a hammock and leaned her elbows on her knees. The wild-rose color had gone from her cheeks.

"Aren't you dead yet?" she asked. "You poor little old Mildred that used to want your mother to hug you as she did Josephine? Did you think for a minute that the little old lady was glad you were here? Why, no one's ever been glad you were anywhere, and no one's going to be."

V.

SHE got out of the hammock, went in through the front door, and up to her bedroom. She threw her hat on a chair and took off her dusty shoes. The slippers she changed to were tan kid affairs, old ones of Josephine's that had found their way by mistake into one of Mildred's trunks. She looked disapprovingly at them as she slipped them on; then she turned to her closet for a gown.

She gazed down the row of limp garments with a little scowl. Black, black and white, white and black, there were plenty of them. At the very end a rose-colored dimity hung.

"Did this also belong to my sweet sister?" Mildred asked herself. She reached in and drew out the dress. It was one of the ill-fated trousseau. She looked in the closet again. Across the end were a number of hooks hung with colored clothes. They had been unpacked by Mrs. Rolfe, who had helped in settling the rooms.

"My old friends," said Mildred. "So you are not dead, either. I thought you had been buried in the storehouse with the furniture and the other things that made my happy home." She looked long at the rose-colored frock.

"It's only a couple of years since you were bought—and I was sold." She laughed roughly and let the gown fall to the floor. "Black, black!" she muttered, looking once more into the closet. "How I hate it!"

She turned to the mirror, scowled at her reflection, and with a sigh walked over to one of the windows.

"Twenty-four I am," she said, "and I look about ninety."

Down by the gate a rose-bush waved a few pink blossoms.

"She said I had a color like that. I never had, and never shall have! I have always been ugly, and always shall be."

There was the tinkle of a bell below. Mildred unfastened her dress, dropped it on the bed, dashed some water on her face and neck, and started for another gown. She tripped over the dimity on the floor and caught it up with an impatient hand.

Then she stopped, slipped it over her head, fastened it and hurried down the stairs.

Mrs. Rolfe was standing by the table as she came in.

"I've made you some muffins," she began; then she saw Mildred's face, flushed to the color of the pink frock she wore. A pleased little gasp escaped her.

"My dear!" she cried. "Oh, how sweet!" and in a moment she had flown from the room.

She came back with a rose in her hand; it shook with her excitement.

"Put it in your hair, dearie. Oh, I said to father only yesterday, 'if only she would get into colors! I can't bear to see her unhappy.'"

Her fingers fussed with a coil of hair, and the pink rose lay against Mildred's sleek head. The stray locks that the wash had loosened had not been brushed back.

The little old lady bustled out again.

Mildred ate her luncheon slowly. There was a lump in her throat. She felt homesick, but not for the dismantled home; heartsick, but not for mother, sister, nor faithless lover. She wished the old lady had not gone away, though she had nothing special to say to her.

There was a shuffling outside the dining-room door. Two pairs of eyes peeped in cautiously. Then two pairs of feet shuffled stealthily away.

"There! Now, what did I say?" cried the old lady, when she and "father" were safely back in the kitchen. "Didn't I tell you 'twas the clothes made her so homely looking?"

"'Twas more than the clothes," main-

tained the old man stoutly. "She's got a different look on her face."

The sound of the dining-room bell interrupted her. Mildred had finished.

"Did you want anything?" asked the old lady.

"No, only to say something. I am going to have a cook and a maid sent out at once."

"Don't I—can't I do it? Don't I suit you?"

"You suit me." Mildred's voice trembled, and her face strained into a smile. "But it isn't right. There's something wrong—I can't let you do it any longer."

"But it's in the contract."

The old lady's blue eyes looked anxiously into Mildred's. The girl put out a steady hand and touched her arm.

"There's nothing in the contract about your waiting on me. I can afford servants. You are not a servant. I was a fool to think it for a moment."

"I'm willing. I've got to earn—"

"You've earned a rest," said Mildred. "I want you to fuss about in the garden. I want you to pick the flowers, and sit in a pretty gray dress on the porch where I—can—look at you."

She gripped the old hand tight.

"Are you glad I'm here?" she gasped painfully.

For answer, the old lady leaned forward and kissed her.

VI.

THE pink dress was crushed, and a withered rose stained the pillow under Mildred's check. She lay where she had sobbed herself to sleep, across the old-fashioned four-poster.

Twilight came on. She awoke suddenly with a vague sense of fear. She sat up on the side of the bed, shivering; then crept to the head of the stairs.

She could hear down-stairs a moving about of people. Suddenly some one opened the kitchen-door. A man was leading across the hall a familiar little figure, bent over and sobbing. The man half carried her into the sitting-room, and the door swung to behind them.

Down-stairs Mildred ran, and into the sitting-room.

"What is it?" she asked sharply. "What is the matter with her?"

The neighbor put his finger to his lips, pointed mysteriously toward the kitchen, and shook his head.

But at the sight of her, Mrs. Rolfe straightened up.

"He's gone!" she cried in a high, broken voice. "Gabriel's gone. And I want to die, too. It ain't right that I should have to live—oh, Heaven, forgive me!"

Mildred was beside her.

"Leave her with me," she said; and the man went out.

Mildred gathered the shaking little figure into her arms.

"As long as you live," she said solemnly, "I will stay with you and care for you and love you."

"Gabriel!" moaned the old lady.

"As long as you live," said Mildred again, "I will stay with you and care for you and love you."

The old lady's arms went around the girl's neck. Half consciously she held herself tight to the strong, slim figure. And Mildred's face was against the tear-wet, withered one. The folds of the rumpled pink gown mingled with the black worsted shawl that some one had wrapped awkwardly over the old lady's thin calico dress.

"It's best he should go first," whispered Mrs. Rolfe brokenly. "He couldn't have stood it without me. But I saw his head droop. I ran to him. I said 'Gabriel'—but he didn't hear me."

A shiver went over her.

Then she looked into Mildred's face.

"Do you mean it," she asked, "about caring for me? I feel so tired—"

Mildred put a tender hand over her mouth.

"I do want you," she said. "More than I ever wanted anything. You are the first person who ever loved me, really loved me."

"I do love you," said the old lady. "I loved you from the minute I saw you, out by the syringa-bush there in the yard. And, father, he loved you, too, only he didn't say much about it."

Mildred rose. She helped the old lady to her feet, and drew the shawl tenderly around her.

"I want you to come up-stairs now," she said, "and lie down on my bed. Everything shall be done just as you

want it, only try to keep as strong as you can—for my sake."

The neighbor, coming from the kitchen, saw them going slowly up the stairs.

"It's mighty lucky that young woman who bought the house is friendly to the old lady," he said to another neighbor at his elbow. "Neither kith nor kin had the poor souls; and the poorhouse stared them in the face, when this girl came along and took a fancy to the farm and paid a good price. Let 'em stay in it, too. Wonder if I'd better ask her about the funeral arrangements?"

"Let 'em be a while," counseled the other. "There's time enough, and the old lady's had an awful shock."

So, youth and age went up the stairs together, and presently Mildred sat with

the old lady's hand in hers, while the pale, wrinkled face on Mildred's pillow relaxed into the sleep of exhaustion.

And Mildred in the rose gown, with her soft hair ruffled about her white forehead, was another Mildred,—a self-forgetting Mildred—a Mildred whose cold and frozen heart had melted and warmed at the steady fire of love that burned in the frail old body that lay there. •

"Mother," she whispered to herself, and tears rolled unchecked down her cheeks. "Dear mother," and the old lady stirred in her sleep.

"Sh—sh!" soothed Mildred, as if to a tired child. Then, again, in a low whisper:

"Mother."

AUTUMN.

No more the cricket's quiet mirth
Sounds from his grassy door.
Or speaks the distant whippoorwill
His admonition o'er.

The autumn songs are tender songs,
But with low minor strains
That seem to breathe of long farewells,
Of mists and moaning rains.

We vow that we will merry be,
And fill the days with cheer.
But springtime songs seem somehow false
With autumn's quiet here.

These are the days when hearts draw near,
And love comes close to keep
The tender blossoms of the soul
From lifelong winter sleep.

So while the gay, glad summer throngs
To silence deep return,
Our souls shall swing their portals wide,
And bright our hearths shall burn!

Arthur Wallace Peach.

THE SECRET OF THE SEALED PACKET.

BY MARVIN DANA.

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE BECKONING HAND.



BRISK knocking on the door of the cabin roused me. For a moment I stared dazedly about the bare room, trying in vain to reconcile this squalor with the familiar furnishings of White's, in London, of which I had been dreaming. Then, of a sudden, I recalled the lamentable truth that I was no longer the lounging in coffee-houses and palaces, squandering my inheritance on gentlemanly follies, but, instead, merely an adventurer in Virginia, of the New World, and, too, an adventurer most wofully bested by fortune.

It was my grandfather who had called halt to my gaieties, since, after dissipating the small estate left me by my father, I had depended on him for the means of indulgence. In the end he wearied of my extravagances, and rebuked me with a harshness not to be endured. So it came about that we parted full of wrath each against the other—for his temper was no more conciliatory than was mine.

In my spleen against the stern old man I vowed to be quit of him wholly, to take no more from him until, in the course of nature, I should take all, at his passing. For the meantime, since the guineas remaining to me were pitifully few, I determined to seek my destiny in the New World.

One who had been the dearest friend of my dead father was high in the councils of the Virginia Colony. Moreover, this gentleman had invited me to join his expedition: I was sure that I could depend on his favor to advance my in-

terests. I set sail, therefore, very joyfully—only to learn, when at last our vessel came to anchor in the Potomac, that Sir Elbert Dunton had departed into Maryland on a mission of importance, whither I had not the means to follow him.

Thus, for the interval before his return, I found myself stranded in the wilds. I dared not accept hospitality in any of the mansions of the planters, since I had no money for play, nor even the wherewithal to fling a gratuity to the grinning blacks. So, out of very pride, I made myself a hermit for the nonce. A deserted cabin, the dilapidated relic of some voyager in the first Virginia Company, served me for domicile; my fowling-piece was the mainstay of my larder.

In such isolation, I awaited Sir Elbert's return. Of friends, of acquaintances even, I had none; no visitor, as yet, had obtruded on my desolation. It was, therefore, with wonderment that I now listened to the tattoo repeated on the cabin-door with imperative loudness.

"Come in!" I called—rather ungraciously, I fear. At the same time I rose and went forward to greet the unexpected guest.

The door swung open, and a man entered hurriedly. Even in the faint light afforded by my single candle, I recognized him at first glance. It was the Chevalier Vanderdecken, whose brigantine lay at anchor in a cove of the river a mile away. I had seen his vessel, and afterward himself, for he had been near me on the wharf at the time of my landing, when, struck by his appearance, I had inquired concerning him. Little seemed to be known of him, or of his mission in the region. He had an-

nounced himself as the agent of certain Dutch interests, and for this reason his presence was tolerated.

For my own part, however, I had some doubt of the man, inasmuch as he displayed none of the usual characteristics of the Teuton. On the contrary, in the slender elegance of his figure and the sprightly grace of his movements, he was typically French. Moreover, he was distinguished by a sumptuousness of apparel which was significant. And, finally, his handsome face was dark, lighted by large, brilliant eyes of black, and the Southern air of him was heightened by the fact that his hair, also of a jetty black, was worn without powder.

It had even occurred to me that this might be some gentlemanly rover of the seas, masking piracy under the guise of a peaceful Dutch explorer. But, just now, my other interests were overcome by surprise at the reason for his presence in this cabin. I must confess, too, that I regarded the young man with a feeling of envy, since my own dress was none too fresh, while he wore an unblemished suit of the finest French cloth, a rich blue, ornamented with silver. I even observed the scarlet heels of his shoes, which showed so curiously inappropriate in the dingy room. Yet the splendor of his garb was not so incongruous as was his courtly manner. His bow had the punctilious exactness fit for a king's levee.

"I beg that you will pardon this intrusion," he said in a melodious voice that had hardly a trace of accent. "I had understood that this cabin was unoccupied. For that reason, a friend and I had appointed it for a meeting-place. Permit me to introduce myself to you: I am the Chevalier Vanderdecken. I regret that I have not had the pleasure of meeting you, sir."

His tone was so graciously apologetic, his bearing so winsome, that my heart warmed to the man. For that matter, my loneliness must have given any one welcome that night.

"I am but recently come hither," I answered readily. "I have set forth from London to seek fortune in the New World. Walter Marr, at your service, chevalier." With that, I swept him my most stately bow, for I was not minded

that he should deem me a boor, though he found me disheveled and dwelling so squalidly. "As for the matter of intrusion," I continued, "in faith, the cabin is as much yours as mine, and you are most welcome to the using of it for the conference of which you have spoken."

The chevalier observed me with a curiosity that was obvious, though courteously veiled. I could guess that my speech and manner were far from anything he had expected to find in one thus housed. He answered, however, without expressing aught of surprise:

"I thank you, Mr. Marr. Be sure that we shall appreciate your kindness. But we would not incommode you."

"I shall not be inconvenienced in the least," I declared eagerly. "I shall but smoke a pipe out of doors, while you and your friend talk together here."

"There is no necessity for your withdrawing," the chevalier answered. "This room is large enough to permit our private conversation apart. No, I beg that you will remain within. The night mists of this wilderness are not agreeable. Besides—" He broke off, as another knock sounded on the door.

"Perhaps you will open to your friend, and explain to him," I suggested.

The chevalier bowed again, and moved toward the door. Ere he reached it, however, it was pushed ajar, and a young man—a lad of twenty or thereabouts—stepped into the cabin.

"Ah, chevalier, you are on time!" he exclaimed. "I—" His eyes fell on me, and he interrupted his speech to stare at me wonderingly.

For my part, I returned the boy's look with equal curiosity, for I had no notion as to his identity. That he was a gentleman was evident at once from his dress and his bearing. He was a well-formed youth, with a pleasant, good-looking face, but his pallor and the circles under his eyes told of dissipation unbecoming one of his years.

He, like the chevalier, was richly dressed. But the lad's gold-corded frock and braided waistcoat lacked the quiet elegance that characterized the other's costume. Now, his hand fell to the silver hilt of his rapier, whereat the chevalier smiled, and I frowned. Then,

as he opened his mouth, the suave voice of Vanderdecken forestalled questions.

"This gentleman," he said with a gesture of his hand toward me, "is Mr. Marr, an English gentleman but recently arrived in the Colony, whom I found in occupancy of the cabin. Of his courtesy, Mr. Marr has invited us to be his guests. Mr. Marr, Mr. Harry Dunton."

At that, I made a bow of recognition in the direction of the lad, who returned it clumsily enough, even surlily. It was plain to be seen that he lacked those graces that mark the man of fashion, but now that I knew his identity, this was easily understood, for he was too young to have received the forming of his manners in town ere his departure to the New World, where, of necessity, the harsh conditions of life were little suited to the finer elegancies of deportment.

I myself, a full ten years his senior, had never hitherto set eyes on the boy, though the mention of his name and the fact of his presence in this region taught me that this could be no other than Sir Elbert's nephew—his heir, as well, for the baronet's only children were two girls.

"You are very welcome here, Mr. Dunton," I said with much heartiness, for I had no wish to be impolite toward the relative of my father's friend. Yet he deserved something of rebuke, for his manner was of a glowering awkwardness that fretted me mightily.

The chevalier interposed blandly, without awaiting a reply from the young man.

"Come, then," he said gaily; "with Mr. Marr's permission, you and I shall sit together on this bench by the wall, and discuss our private concerns in tones so discreet as not to disturb our host's musings over his pipe." As he concluded, he nodded toward me with a friendly smile.

Under the spell of the chevalier's pleasant address, I smiled in return, and then betook myself to a bench on the opposite side of the room, where, after lighting my pipe from the tallow candle that guttered on a shelf at hand, I bestowed myself comfortably. From time to time, between whiffs of the Virginia weed, I directed a curious glance toward the two, but I contrived to re-

strain my bewilderment from any rude manifestation. Nevertheless, I was wholly perplexed over the nature of the connection between the twain.

That it was of serious import to them was evident from the eagerness and gravity of their murmured conversation. I could not distinguish their words, but their manner was significant. Evidently, there was a strong bond of interest between the two. I could hazard no guess as to its character, but the strangeness of the affair bore on me heavily. I could imagine no possible unity of advantage between the loutish heir of Sir Elbert and the gentlemanly adventurer of the Dutch name and the Gallic manner.

And then, as I studied the face of the boy, a vague disquietude seized on me. In the lines of his expression were those two things most dangerous in combination—weakness and dissipation. It was certain that here was one to be led easily; and, too, one predisposed to vicious courses. Was it likely that the lad possessed sufficient principle to restrain him from accepting aught that would offer the means for self-indulgence? There was small hint of strength in his face. He exhibited just those characteristics which might make him the prey of an older, a cleverer, a more sturdy scoundrel.

And, of a verity, was not the Chevalier Vanderdecken one fitted to sway him—a man in his prime, handsome, charming, intelligent, possessed of all the graces the youth lacked so lamentably? It was true that the fellow had won my liking of the moment by his polished affability; nevertheless, I recalled my first instinct of distrust, and wondered if it were a subtle whisper of warning.

But presently I shrugged my shoulders, disdaining such concern. After all, the affair was none of mine. Doubtless the mannerless cub owed our fine gentleman money lost at cards or dice. Their solemn faces seemed witness that they talked between themselves of that most deadly serious thing, money.

And at that, as if to justify my cynical surmise, my ears caught a single word spoken a little louder than its fellows in the lad's querulous voice. That word was "guineas!"

I smiled to myself at such verification of my suspicions, but in the next moment the word was quite forgotten, for another sound drew my attention and held it. Yet for some time I could make out nothing concerning this faint noise of tapping. At the outset, even, it sounded so faintly that I half doubted my ears. After a little it was interrupted for a brief interval, only to be resumed insistently, though always most softly.

It was altogether unlike any of the usual night sounds to which I had already grown accustomed in this wilderness. Its indistinctness made it impossible to determine its location with any measure of accuracy. For that matter, it was my eyes that solved the mystery at last. I chanced to turn them toward the unshuttered window of the cabin, which was in the wall between me and the two in conference.

There was a moon almost at the full that night, though scudding racks of cloud veiled it from time to time. Just now, however, it was clear, and, together with the starlight, made the night radiant. The mist, which lay thick on the river two hundred yards away, had not crept quite to the top of the knoll on which the cabin perched. So, in that clear air of summer, I could see distinctly enough through the opening, for within the flickering tallow was hardly so luminous as was the outer night.

And that which I now saw caused me to grow tense, of sheer amazement. I beheld a face—the face of a girl who peered at me from without the window of the cabin. She was standing aside, so that she was hidden from the view of the chevalier and his companion. One hand, resting against the casement of the window, showed whence had come that soft sound of tapping. And now, as her eyes caught mine, this hand was raised to her lips in sign of silence, and the other beckoned me imperatively.

CHAPTER II.

A QUESTION OF HONOR.

FOR a moment I stared, incredulous, at the vision. Even in that first shock of astonishment, I was poignantly aware of the girl's loveliness, and

delighted in it. But my temporary apathy was dispelled by a sudden frown that touched her brow and by a repetition of the beckoning gesture, a repetition abrupt and impatient. I nodded hastily, in signification of understanding and obedience. I nodded again, in promise of silence, as she placed a finger to her lips for the second time.

Forthwith, the face vanished from the window, and I turned to stare dazedly toward the unconscious chevalier and Harry Dunton. The pair were still conversing with much animation of manner, and, indeed, seemed to give me no heed as I rose and sauntered toward the open door. But just as I reached it the chevalier faced about abruptly, though his voice was as gently suave as before when he spoke to me.

"I hope, Mr. Marr, that we are not so unfortunate as to disturb you."

"Not in the least." I returned truthfully. "But I have a fancy to take a look at the night without. Pray continue your conversation, chevalier, at your pleasure."

At that the chevalier smiled pleasantly upon me, and, turning again to the lad, resumed speech with him. As for myself, without any appearance of haste—since I had no wish to arouse the suspicions of this quick-witted foreigner—I sauntered out of the cabin with the best air of carelessness I could command; and then, when safely out of sight of those within, gazed about me eagerly.

At first, however, I could not see the girl, for she was no longer anywhere near the window. Convinced that she had sought shelter at a distance, I hurried down the slope of the knoll, casting sharp glances on every side; but still without finding trace of the unknown visitor. Then, finally, as I approached the limits of the cleared space, I perceived a shadowy form beneath a magnolia-tree. In a moment more I had come close to her, and halted to await her pleasure.

She advanced a step to meet me, and this brought her forth from the veil of the tree's shadow into the revelation of the moonlight. I was very near her now, and the ravishment of her beauty fell on me, so that I stood stock-still, re-

garding her with eyes of wonder and reverent delight, the while my heart leaped and my blood went thrilling through me.

Now that I look back to that time, I realize that the place and the night joined their spell to hers, though Heaven knows that hers alone had been enough. There was a subtle fragrance of the virginal and the primeval in the woodland scents that hung on the languorous southern air. The unfortunate adventurer who had built his cabin in the clearing had dreamed perhaps to make of this spot a home, for he had planted roses, which now clustered thick about, and the odor of them was in my nostrils.

There were, too, the perfumes of jasmine and of mignonette. Behind and above the girl the blossoms of the magnolia-tree moved daintily, tenderly, as if they were the wings of angels over her. The scene and the hour were fit for the swaying of one to dreams of love. And here, in the person of the girl, was the embodiment of all that I had ever dreamed concerning love—the embodiment of all, and of more.

She was of a slender dignity, whose grace was not to be concealed even by the shrouding folds of the long mantle that draped her from shoulder to heel. But it was her face—her face as I saw it there in the moonlight—that enthralled me. A scarf of black lace covered her head; beneath it I caught little glimpses of the coronal of powdered hair. Below the white of her tresses and of her forehead, the delicate arches of her black brows showed boldly over the softly radiant splendor of her eyes. The scarlet, curving lips had been fashioned, as it seemed to me then, only for kisses; yet just now, they were bent to lines half timid, half courageous. As I stared at her thus raptly, she, too, scrutinized me—not, alas! with delight like mine. Yet, I thank Heaven that, as I afterward came to know, she counted me honest and brave.

The silence that lay between us was, after all, but a matter of seconds. It was she who spoke first.

"Sir," she said softly, and her voice was a melody in my ears. "I have ventured thus to summon you because my plight is desperate."

I made her a bow of humble deference. Delight sprang in my breast that such as she could have any need of me.

"You have but to command me!" I exclaimed warmly. "Pray tell me in what fashion Walter Marr can serve a lady in distress."

"Oh, you are Walter Marr!" the girl cried softly. "But, then, I do not understand. You cannot be that Walter Marr, the son of my father's friend. He is in London, a man of fashion—"

"He is so no longer," I admitted, with some embarrassment; "he stands before you in this unworthy guise. Having ruined himself at home, he now seeks asylum abroad. Having lost what little fortune he had in the Old World, he now hunts a new one in this world that is new. Fate is, indeed, kind to him, since it offers him this opportunity to serve."

Even as I bowed again, I saw the rose hue deepen in her cheeks, but she gave no other recognition of the ardor that was in the phrase. Instead, she demanded curiously, even, as it seemed to my pleased ears, indignantly:

"But why did you not come to us? Why are you here, and with these companions?"

The first question reminded me of that which, in my consuming admiration for her, I had for the moment quite forgotten—my ignorance as to her identity, despite the fact that she seemed so familiar with mine.

"I had meant to visit Sir Elbert Dunton," I explained. "He was so good as to invite me to join him here."

"Then, why did you not come to us?" she asked again.

At the words, it flashed on me that certainly this could be no other than one of the baronet's daughters, and I ventured to voice the thought.

"Yes," the girl answered simply. "I am Ellen Dunton. I do not understand, sir, why you did not at once come to us."

Shamefacedly, I made excuse to the effect that, having heard of Sir Elbert's absence, I had decided to await his return from the journey into Maryland before visiting the mansion. Naturally, I was not too precise in my relation of the truth, since poverty is not a thing to be paraded before a woman.

"Therefore, I chose this retreat for the interval," I concluded, with a wave of my hand in the direction of the cabin.

The final words carried the girl's thoughts instantly into another channel. She twined the slender fingers of her hands distressedly, and spoke in a tone of vehement anxiety.

"Tell me, then, Mr. Marr," she urged, "what have you to do with this man? What is the Chevalier Vanderdecken to you? And what has he to do with Harry Dunton?"

"In faith, Mistress Dunton," I answered, astounded anew by the intensity of her manner, "I know naught of either—at least, no more than their names and their faces."

"But," she persisted confusedly, "how is it, then, that they are here—that I find you in consultation with them?"

"Mistress Dunton has been deceived by circumstances to-night," I rejoined, somewhat stiffly, since it was evident that she had doubt of me. Forthwith, I explained to her in detail the events of the evening, and my wholly passive share in them.

The girl listened eagerly, and, when I had done, sighed with relief.

"It is well," she declared. "And," she added hesitatingly, "I—know that I can trust Mr. Walter Marr. My father and yours—"

"I pledge you all my faith," I protested. "You have said that something troubled you—I beg you to command my aid."

She gave me a long look then—a look that searched my soul. I bore it well enough, for, of a truth, I felt myself willing to lay at her feet all my hopes, even life itself. The scrutiny must have reassured her, for at once when it was done she began on the matter that occasioned her apprehension.

"Tell me, then, Mr. Marr," she questioned hurriedly, "has any packet passed between my Cousin Harry and this Chevalier Vanderdecken?"

"Not to my knowledge," I replied.

"But you would have seen, if such had been the case?" she argued.

"Yes," I answered reflectively, "I believe that nothing was exchanged between them during the time that I was

with them in the cabin. I sat so that I could have seen. Part of the time, indeed, I watched them out of idle curiosity."

The girl breathed again a sigh of relief, though the anxious frown did not pass from her brows.

"Heard you aught that they said?" she asked.

"Why, as to that, no," I made reply. "Naturally, I had no wish to overhear their private conversation."

"Not a single word?" she persisted.

At this I smiled a little.

"Why, as to that, Mistress Dunton," I answered, "I did overhear one word, a single word."

"Ah!" she exclaimed eagerly, "And what was the word? Tell me, please."

"The one word that I heard," I replied, still smiling, "was 'guineas.'"

But the girl did not smile, although her face brightened visibly.

"Oh," she said softly, "it is then as I had guessed, had hoped. The affair is not yet completed. Otherwise, there had been no mention of money, only the exchange of it. There may be time, after all."

This she murmured rapidly, with her eyes downcast, as if in communion with her own thoughts rather than in address to me. But now she again raised her eyes to mine. In their brilliant depths was an eagerness of appeal that set me tingling with desire to serve her. Ere she asked, I was ready to grant any prayer she might make to me. And yet, when she made known her petition, I must needs hesitate.

"I wish your aid at once, Mr. Marr," she said. "Will you now return into the cabin, and there observe most carefully all that passes between my cousin and this chevalier? Strain your ears for any word they utter; watch each gesture, in the effort to understand something of the matter with which they are occupied."

"But Mistress Dunton forgets," I objected. "She cannot expect me to act the spy on these men."

At my protest the girl drew herself proudly erect and flashed on me a glance of scorn.

"Am I, I think you," she demanded wrathfully, "one to invite you toward

ought dishonorable? On the contrary, let me tell you, sir, that this which I ask of you is in behalf of honor. Your refusal would be the only shame."

I shrank before the indignation in her voice, yet I was not wholly convinced.

"The position is delicate," I suggested, "inasmuch as these two are, in a way, my guests: they are conferring together in the cabin now at my invitation. For that reason—"

The girl interrupted me with brisk petulance.

"I understand all that," she retorted. "In this case, such scruples are out of place. The affair is too important for petty punctilios. This chevalier was my father's guest. Scruples have not deterred him from evil machinations against his host, have not restrained him from playing on the weakness of a boy. I must not speak more clearly. Can you not believe me when I tell you that this which I ask of you is right? I can say but one thing more: the service I beg of you is not merely in behalf of the honor of a family; it is, too, something for our country's sake. So, now, I ask again, will you not help me in this, Mr. Marr?"

Before the beauty of her, and her imperiousness and her pleadings, I was wholly won to the mysterious cause, whatever its nature might be; and so I told her. Indeed, I told her with an earnestness that made her cast down her eyes in confusion and to blush most rosily. Yet my curiosity was profoundly stirred by her allusions to family and to country, and I did not forbear a question.

"Will you not explain to me, Mistress Dunton? Give me some hint, at least."

But the girl shook her head.

"No," she said firmly. "Perhaps, some day in the future—certainly, not now. But you have promised. I—I put my trust in you, Mr. Marr. I shall see you again very soon."

"You will let me come to you?" I questioned warmly.

Again she shook her head in obvious perplexity.

"Please wait until you see me again, or until you have a message from me," she said at last decisively. "It will not

be long. In the meantime—to-night—learn what you can from your guests. And now, good night!"

The girl extended her hand toward me. I took the slender fingers in mine, and bent and kissed them with tender reverence. As I straightened, she turned and entered the forest path, going swiftly. A moment more, and she had vanished within the shadows of the wood.

CHAPTER III.

RAPIERS BY CANDLE-LIGHT.

AT once, after the girl's disappearance, I turned and made my way back to the cabin, for I was mindful of my promise. Yet for the moment I gave little thought to the matter between the two men on whom she had set me to play the spy. Instead, my heart was moved to wondering delight in the loveliness and the charm of this dryad of the forest, who had so strangely come to me from out the wilderness.

As yet I did not realize the full truth—that I loved her; that to me she was the one woman in all the world—but I felt the magnetism of her, none the less, though I did not appreciate its significance in my life. I gloried in her beauty; I exulted in the intimate association a kindly fate had created between us.

The radiant vision of her was before my eyes; the music of her voice was in my ears, as I entered the cabin. But I had sense enough to conceal the tumult of my mood, and to saunter carelessly to my former place on the bench opposite the two, the while I constrained my features to an expression as lackadaisical as my powers of dissimulation could contrive. Young Dunton and the foreigner were still talking together very earnestly, and they did not interrupt their conversation at my approach.

I picked up my pipe from the shelf, where I had placed it before leaving the cabin, and relighted it from the flame of the candle. Then I stretched myself in my former lounging attitude on the settle, holding my ears open for any word spoken carelessly loud. But the two, despite the eagerness with which

they conversed, were discreet as well, so that I found myself unable to distinguish so much as a syllable of that which passed between them.

As the minutes sped thus fruitlessly, I began to fear lest, after all, I should gain nothing which might prove of service to Mistress Dunton. The thought filled me with dismay, for I appreciated in a measure the importance which she attached to the affair, little as I understood of it. I guessed that she would regard me with favor or with reproach, according to my success or failure in the task she had imposed on me.

Since now the ruling desire of my life had suddenly come to be the pleasuring of her, I was racked with anxiety to learn something of what was toward between Master Harry and the chevalier. Yet was I forced, despite my longing, to sit inactive, my ears futile against the studied restraint of their speech.

And then, of a sudden, when I was quite in despair from racking my wits with profitless puzzlings over some possible means of inquiry, fate intervened to aid me. The chevalier turned abruptly toward me.

"Mr. Marr," he said, with the bland cordiality of voice that was characteristic of him, "Mr. Dunton and I are desirous of asking even a second favor of your kindness."

The chevalier paused, smiling expectantly on me. It was evident that he confidently awaited from me an expression of amiable acquiescence. But, for a moment, I felt myself utterly at a loss. To hide this confusion, and to gain time for the subduing of it, I took a long pull from the pipe. It was still my instinct to be revolted by a deception of these men who were, technically at least, my guests.

But again I remembered the words of the girl concerning this affair—how the honor of a family was involved, and the welfare of our country. I knew, too, that I could trust her absolutely. Therefore, I believed blindly in the righteousness of the cause which she espoused. For her sake I must do the things she had commanded, even though my gorge rose against them.

The whole period of my hesitation was very brief, a matter of seconds.

Then I blew forth a cloud of smoke, and nodded affable assent to the chevalier's inquiry.

"I shall be glad to aid you to the best of my poor ability," I declared quietly, "though I must confess that I scarce understand in what manner my services can avail you."

"The matter lies thus," Vanderdecken rejoined promptly. "There is an affair that has to do with a packet. The thing in itself is a trifle, but necessary for the consummation of a certain business negotiation between myself and Mr. Dunton."

At this mention of a packet I started perceptibly, but I had sufficient presence of mind to disguise this by merging it in a change of posture; and the chevalier's sharp eyes failed to observe the shock of surprise which his words had caused in me.

"It is of some import to me," that gentleman continued, "that this packet should be delivered for me to-morrow. Unfortunately, my time is fully taken up just now, as is that of Mr. Dunton, and we are unable to set a time of meeting available for the both of us. Moreover, there are reasons why this cabin would be a most convenient point for each of us to reach. In view of these facts, we have decided to impose upon your goodness for a second time, if you will so permit us. With your consent, Mr. Dunton will bring the packet to this place early on the morrow, and deliver it into your keeping. You will afterward give it into my hands at such time as I may be able to claim it, which will be very shortly."

As the chevalier spoke thus, my thoughts ran nimbly. Now that I knew something more serious than the payment of a gambling debt was involved, I could detect reasons for the proposed arrangement. Doubtless the two had urgent need of caution, and had no wish that others of the Colony should see them in company. This fact was witnessed by their choice of the cabin as a rendezvous when they supposed it deserted. A visit of Harry Dunton to the chevalier's brigantine would attract attention, for the gossiping blacks were always loitering about the wharves.

Finally, since chance had led me to a

knowledge of this secret meeting, there was little danger, as they would imagine, in my having information as to further communication between them. These reflections of mine kept pace with the rather clumsy explanation of the foreigner, and when, at last, he came to a pause, I was ready with my reply.

"Why, as to that, assuredly you may command me," I said nonchalantly. "I shall be in or about the cabin here throughout the day. If I am not within, a hail will summon me. Your matter will not inconvenience me in the slightest."

"Sir," said the chevalier, rising and bowing in his most graceful and stately fashion, "it is indeed a pleasure to meet in this wilderness a gentleman of parts and of honor."

At this gracious compliment, I rose and bowed low in my turn, but I made no other answer, though I understood his reference clearly enough. This shrewd judge of men had decided that I was not one to betray a trust; he believed that the seals of his packet would remain unbroken while it was in my possession. But I wondered if he could, with all his sharpness, guess that I trusted his honor as little as he suspected mine. The fascination of the man was a curious and a compelling thing, but behind his charm lurked something that repelled me. From the first, he had provoked in me a vague hostility; now, by reason of Mistress Dunton, this hostility was become dominant.

The chevalier turned from me, and addressed Harry Dunton. There was a note of exultation in his voice, and though he spoke aside to his companion, and moderated his tones somewhat, the words came to me clearly.

"I think, Harry," he said, "that we shall foil that meddling Mistress Ellen very neatly."

At the saying, a great wrath blazed in me. There was a vicious insolence in his manner of speaking that was even more insulting than the phrase itself. The blood in my temples throbbed fiercely. I strode forward to the chevalier, who looked up in astonishment at my impetuous movement.

"Is it possible," I demanded as I halted just in front of him, "that by

any chance the Chevalier Vanderdecken refers to Mistress Ellen Dunton?"

My voice was quiet enough, for I exerted all my self-control to make it so; but I think that the man understood very well the rage that burned in me. His face hardened, and its expression grew malignant in the short interval before he made reply. There came into his eyes as they met mine a glow of fierceness that was, as I perceived even then, half contemptuous. It was certain that, whatever faults might belong to this graceful gentleman, he was not a coward.

His voice was as gently smooth as before when he answered my question by another.

"And if the Chevalier Vanderdecken chooses to speak of Mistress Ellen Dunton, what is that to Mr. Marr?"

"This!" I cried in a fury.

With the word, I slapped the fellow soundly on his smiling lips.

"A lady's name should ever be spoken with respect by a gentleman," I remarked more calmly, for the blow had afforded some outlet to my passion.

"Your argument, sir," the chevalier said grimly, "can be answered in but one way. There is here, fortunately, ample space for our play, though the light is none too brilliant."

Having thus spoken, the foreigner at once proceeded to divest himself of his coat and to roll up the sleeves of his shirt in a most businesslike manner, in which preparations I imitated him. Within a minute the two of us stood opposite each other in the center of the cabin floor, rapiers drawn, scabbards cast aside. We saluted with punctilious formality, and set to. Throughout all this and what followed, the boy, Harry, remained gaping at us from his bench by the wall, nor uttered a single word, whether out of discretion or from timidity I could not tell.

Now, I must confess that I regarded with much complacency a very pretty skill which I possess with the rapier. There was none among my acquaintance in London who could best me in a bout with the foils. In the few meetings I had had—affairs thrust upon me, for I am not usually of a quarrelsome temper—I had come off victor, disabling

my adversaries without giving them fatal hurt. So, then, as my blade slithered over that of the chevalier, I was confident of my power to punish right speedily this foreigner's impertinence toward a woman. Indeed, I had no hesitation in pushing the assault at the start, and, after a favorite feint in tierce, lunged in carte to my enemy's shoulder.

To my surprise, the chevalier, with a circle parry, riposted so swiftly that only a wild leap backward saved me from being spitted. The humiliation of this, however, taught me discretion. I was become aware that my adversary possessed an excellent skill of sword. So, at the second engagement, I exercised an unaccustomed caution.

For a moment after the recovery of position, the pair of us remained passive in alert attention, steel to steel, eye to eye. Then, inasmuch as the chevalier still made no effort against me, I resumed a measure of confidence, and ventured again to attack. This time I tried on him my favorite play—a swift swing of the two blades by a parry of tierce, with a following lunge in low tierce. Always, hitherto, I had caught an enemy unawares by this stroke, yet, now, it failed. For the chevalier, even as in my parry I swung his blade aside, turned the movement into a moulin, lightning-like in its darting speed, which met my thrust and threw it wide. And in the same second his point swerved to my wrist.

The rapier dropped from my hand and fell, clattering, to the floor of the cabin. I found myself standing dazedly, with my eyes staring at the bare flesh of my right forearm, where a crimson streak gaped suddenly. Of a verity, the wound was but a trifling thing that left tendons and muscles untouched. A careful bandaging would put me serviceable again, save for a little stiffness. Nevertheless, for the present, the hurt was fatal to my purpose. I was indeed disarmed and helpless before my enemy. The thought bit more sharply than had the steel. I shifted my gaze from the red gush of the wound to the face of the chevalier.

He stood in an attitude of careless ease, with the crimsoned tip of his rapier resting lightly on the floor. His

face was smiling now, in an expression both courteous and kindly; there was no longer any hint of cruelty or fierceness in the gaze that met mine. When he spoke, his voice was even more softly modulated than usual. Its insinuating persuasiveness had a singular effect on me, which was beyond that produced by the words themselves, although these were of a sort to disarm resentment.

"Mr. Marr," he said with great dignity, "you unhappily misunderstood me. Therefore, sir, you insulted me after a fashion such as no gentleman may endure. For your blow, I exacted a penalty. Had I so chosen, I might have made your punishment more severe."

The chevalier paused here, as if awaiting comment from me—perhaps objection, had I aught to offer. But, for my part, I was not minded to contradict him. In the mouth of another, his speech might have sounded like unseemly boasting. From him, however, it came to me as commendable frankness. Indeed, as I judged, he spoke no more than the truth, for he was beyond any question my master at fence. So I said nothing at all, and after a moment he continued:

"As for the cause of your anger, Mr. Marr, permit me to give you the explanation which your haste prevented. I must confess that I spoke carelessly of Mistress Dunton. I may add that, unhappily for me, the lady and I are not friends. I assure you, however, that the words I uttered were spoken without thought of serious disrespect. I admit that they were unbecoming—the outcome of a petty spite, of which I am ashamed. I beg leave to withdraw them. I offer you my very sincere and humble apology."

The gentleman ended with another bow. Then, without requiring answer from me, he stepped to my side.

"Permit me," he said gently, "to bind up your wound?"

The kindness in his voice was not to be resisted. In response to his question, I directed him to the spot where he might find linen and salve, and these he secured at once. Then, with a dexterity that witnessed much experience, he cleansed the wound, applied the ointment, and put on the bandages. When

he had finished. I thanked him. I did it awkwardly enough, for I could not reconcile myself to his varying moods, despite his plausibility.

But he afforded me no time for reflection ere surprising me yet once again. He lifted his eyes to mine, and in them was an expression of grave confidence as he spoke.

"Now that this misapprehension has been cleared away, Mr. Marr, I trust that you will still be willing to carry out your part of our agreement concerning the packet. The hour grows late, and it would be difficult to make other arrangements."

I bowed in acquiescence, though the suggestion was altogether contrary to my wish. Before his courteous assurance I found myself helpless.

"I thank you," the chevalier said earnestly. "And, so, good night."

With that he put out his hand, and I laid mine in it, for again I was swayed by his will against my own. Forthwith he turned toward the boy, who continued his silent staring from the bench.

"Come, Harry!" he called sharply.

Master Dunton scrambled to his feet obediently and gave me his loutish bow.

"Good night," he mumbled, and followed the chevalier out of the cabin.

Left again to my solitude, I first picked up my rapier and sheathed it, then gave myself over to long musing, in which were wonder over the mystery of the night and shame for my defeat—but, most of all, delight in the memory of Mistress Ellen Dunton. And in the thought of her, the wonder and the shame vanished; there remained only the delight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEALED PACKET.

IN the morning I breakfasted on ship's bread and the remains of a turkey which I had shot two nights before from its roosting-place in a tree. A cup of water from the spring near by served me for drink. When I had made an end of eating I betook myself to a seat in the open doorway of the cabin, with the intent of enjoying a pipeful of tobacco, of which I had grown surprisingly fond.

But I had scarcely set tinder to the bowl when I heard the sound of some one crashing through the thickets of the forest. A minute later Master Harry Dunton appeared within the opening, and came hurrying up the knoll to the cabin.

"Good morning, Mr. Marr," he cried cordially, as he halted before me. "I am glad to find you up already. Gad, sir, I thought you must be still abed, for the sun is scarce risen. But 'twas more convenient for me to come at this hour."

I had got to my feet as the lad drew near, and bowed in answer to his salutation, but before I had time for remark he went on speaking.

"And here is the packet," he said, and there were traces of a considerable excitement in his voice. He pulled from an inner pocket of his coat a parcel, which he thrust toward me.

I received it with mingled emotions, among which curiosity was, I think, the chief, and my rapid scrutiny of it was very close. It was a thin and narrow packet, some eight inches in length, with a covering of oiled silk, sealed at the two ends. At once, as my eyes fell on the impressions in the wax of the seals, indignation and dismay moved in me, for the crest was that of Sir Elbert Dunton.

Indeed, for the time being, I was vastly astonished that the youth before me should have had the audacity thus to venture the revelation of his wrongdoing. It seemed to me then that he must have long known my name and, therefore, my acquaintance with Sir Elbert, and my consequent familiarity with the baronet's crest. Afterward, however, I learned that, as a matter of fact, Master Harry knew nothing of Walter Marr. This was because he had but recently come to reside with his uncle, and even then he had little intimacy with his relatives, preferring instead the company of the most reckless young men of the neighborhood in their dissipations.

So, now, as he watched my examination of the packet, he was not in the least disquieted.

"You will keep it safe for the chevalier, will you not, Mr. Marr?" he inquired. As he spoke there was an odd note of triumph in his voice, that caused me to glance at him curiously.

"Why, yes, Mr. Dunton," I replied. "I will keep it safe."

The answer was ambiguous enough. Had he pressed me, I would have said more as to my purpose, but the boy was unsuspicious and content with the evasive response.

He offered a few more expressions as polite as his lubberly fashions could contrive, then rushed off down the knoll, and disappeared into the wood by the path that Mistress Dunton had followed on the night before. That fact swung my thoughts from the parcel, which I had bestowed in a pocket, to renewed musings concerning the girl. In this absorption I quite forgot my pipe until the fire died out of it; but the fact passed unheeded, and afterward, from time to time, I sucked the clay uselessly, without observing any lack.

It had just dawned on me that the vision of the night was not only the most beautiful I had ever seen, but also the most surpassingly lovely of all past or future ages in the world, when the falsity of this conclusion was suddenly made manifest. In the intensity of my meditation I had not heard a light tread over the turf of the knoll; but now, abruptly, I felt a presence, and looked up, to behold her standing motionless a yard in front of me. She was clad in a riding-habit that generously revealed the slender, curving graces of her form. One gauntleted hand held riding-mask and whip; over the other was thrown the train of her robe. On her head was a blue cap of cloth like that of her dress, set off with a trailing white plume.

I took in these details all unconsciously. The whole picture of her was printed on my memory exactly and indelibly. Yet, at the moment, I had not thought for aught save the glory of her face, which now, in the searching brilliance of the sunlight, revealed a vivacious perfection that the night had veiled. As the soft radiance of her eyes met my gaze fairly, the heart in me jumped, and I felt the blood burn in my cheeks.

An overpowering constraint beset me as I stood up before her, and without a word I bowed low, in order that such homage might hide from her the stress of the emotion she caused. And then, even as I made that obeisance, the truth

rushed on me, and I knew that I loved her. As my head bowed before her presence, my spirit knelt in worship.

But Mistress Dunton was most concerned with the affair of the packet.

"Pray tell me, Mr. Marr," she urged, with no delay, "all that you have learned. I saw Harry in the wood. Luckily, I heard him, and had time to hide myself from his sight. I guessed he had been to you. But tell me everything, if you please."

By the time she had done speaking I had recovered composure sufficient for the occasion. It was, indeed, with a keen sense of triumph that I put my hand to a pocket and plucked forth from it the packet. The girl made no effort to take it from me—to my great relief, for my duty in the matter was not yet clear to me. But there was no mistaking the delight in her face.

"Ah—ah!" she cried softly. "It seems impossible, but there can be no mistake. You have it, Mr. Marr—you!"

"Yes," quoth I, elated, "I have it." And then, in the next instant, I blurted forth my difficulty. "But, Mistress Dunton, I am under a pledge to deliver this packet to the Chevalier Vanderdecken. You see, madam, I could not explain to him; I could not haggle terms when he asked me to oblige him and your cousin, Master Harry Dunton. To have done so would have been to give them warning, to put them on their guard."

"Tell me," the girl said, "exactly what you mean, Mr. Marr. I do not understand."

So, very precisely, I told her the story of what had occurred in the cabin the night before, after her departure, with one exception. I said nothing of the chevalier's reference to her, and the quarrel that had followed it.

"You will perceive, then, Mistress Dunton," I concluded, "that I am placed in an unhappy predicament. I have engaged to receive this packet, and to deliver it to the chevalier. My word to that effect has been given."

"Ah! As to that," the girl declared, "your giving of this packet to the Chevalier Vanderdecken would mean an injury to the fair fame of your friend, Sir Elbert, my father; and, more than that, it would work harm to your country,

It is then impossible that you should thus aid this man. You, sir, promised unwittingly. Now that I have made the truth clear, honor forbids your fulfilling of that obligation." She smiled a little, as a sudden thought came to her. "You must e'en compromise," she suggested, "by carrying out the half of your contract. You have received the packet, as you were pledged to do. Now, you shall retain it."

"Retain it!" I repeated in astonishment. I had thought that she would wish it given into her keeping.

"Yes," she replied, with a decisive nod of the head, "you must retain it. It will be safer in your care than in my father's house. Guard it well until—"

"Until?" I urged, as she hesitated.

"Until the return of my father. Then, sir, you will deliver it into his own hands. To do this cannot be otherwise than right, Mr. Marr; since the packet belongs to him. It is sealed with his own seal, by his own hand. None other has a claim to it."

"Yes," I agreed, "your argument is convincing. You leave me no choice. I shall keep the packet against Sir Elbert's coming. Will that be soon, Mistress Dunton?"

"We expect his arrival daily now," the girl answered. "But, in the meantime, you must beware of the chevalier."

"Yes, madam," I assented grimly. "I imagine that he will not be pleased when I refuse him the packet. You may be sure that I shall take all needful precautions against him. But will you not tell me who is this man?"

At my question the girl drew herself up haughtily.

"I know but little of him," she said bitterly; "and that little is too much, by far. In truth, we know of him no more than what he himself has told us. Somehow, he obtained from my father an invitation to our house. At first we liked him—my sister and I, my father and my brother. He even ventured to pay his addresses to me."

The girl spoke the last sentence falteringly, and her cheeks crimsoned, but she continued bravely.

"But soon something that he barely hinted provoked my suspicions against him. It was on account of this that I

played the spy on him and on my cousin, Harry, who had grown very intimate with him. And what I overheard filled me with shame and fear. Because of it I came hither last night. There was none other in whom I could confide my trouble—not even my sister—so I summoned you to my aid."

"They know of your espionage!" I exclaimed, for I remembered the words of the chevalier that had aroused my wrath against him.

"Yes," the girl answered simply. "They detected my presence the first time I listened to them, and they guessed that I had been eavesdropping. The fact matters nothing, however, save that it makes them more cautious in their villainy."

She spoke with hot contempt, and this fiery mood showed her still more beautiful, as she stood with her head held high, with her great eyes flashing, her form drawn tense. Forsooth, I deemed it small wonder that the chevalier had paid court to her. What man would not? I hated the fellow briskly now, because he was her enemy. I was swept by a gust of rage against the fate that made me powerless to strike him down. And then I was filled with rejoicing over the fact that I was to have a part in the baffling of his evil machinations.

Such emotions thrilled me during the brief interval of silence that lay between the girl and myself. And then she spoke again, this time in her usual voice of quiet music:

"So, I thank you, Mr. Marr, for what you have done already, and for what you will do in my behalf. It seems to me wiser that you remain here until such time as my father shall return, though I vow the mansion seems a strange one for Mr. Walter Marr, of London town. Alas, I fear, however, that, under the circumstances, my Cousin Harry would prove but a sorry host to you. Things will be quite different when my father is come home. Then you will, of course, come to us. Now, I must hasten home. If anything new occurs, you will let me know, Mr. Marr?"

"Yes, Mistress Dunton," I answered eagerly. "But you will permit me to escort you now?"

"No," she replied; "we must not be

seen together. Prudence requires that we keep our acquaintance a secret for the present. My groom is waiting with the horses in the road by the river. I told him that I had a fancy for a stroll in the wood. Good-by, Mr. Marr. And, again, thank you."

With the last words she gave me her hand, and for the second time I dared to kiss the delicate fingers. There was, I know, an unmistakable ardor in my manner of doing this; the act became not a mere salutation of courtesy, but a caress. Her hand trembled within mine, and, as I raised my head, I saw that her eyes were downcast, her cheeks flaming. I was sorely afraid lest my audacity had moved her to anger against me.

But as she took her hand from me and turned away her look was lifted to meet mine. The glance was of the briefest, yet I dare swear that there was no wrath in it, nor even any coldness. It seemed to me, instead, that in her eyes shone a soft kindliness. Forthwith, a rapture of hope throbbed hotly within me the while I stood watching her as she went down the slope of the knoll and on into the recesses of the forest. And afterward, when she had quite disappeared, the joy of her presence still abode with me.

For the rest of that day I thought rarely of the chevalier and of the packet—always of her. Yet because I thought of her, and of the charge she had laid upon me, I took my fowling-piece and spent the next hours afar in the forest, that thus I might avoid any who came to seek me at the cabin; nor did I return until so late in the evening that none, as I judged, would be in waiting.

As I crossed the clearing, and came again to the hut, there was no sign of anything about, nor any sound beyond the usual softly mysterious noises of the woodland. Yet, from the first of my isolation here, the night of the wilderness had bred in me vague alarms—a subtle dread that had its origin in the unknown.

It was on account of this that I always barred my door, and so I did to-night, with no thought of a definite enemy. Nevertheless, I had not lain for a minute on my pallet when I heard something moving without the door. In-

stantly I slipped from the couch and darted to the single window, of which the shutter stood open. I drew it shut slowly, with such care that it made not the slightest noise.

Immediately there came a loud knocking at the door, which covered the sound made by the bar's slipping into its sockets. I returned to the pallet, and seated myself on it, with the fowling-piece across my knees. For a little the heavy knocking continued, but I made no answer, and presently the visitor abandoned the effort. A short period of silence followed, then a voice cried sharply:

"Mr. Marr! Mr. Marr! Awake! Open!"

I recognized the tones easily enough. This nocturnal visitor was, indeed, as I guessed, none other than the chevalier himself. He knocked again, and called as well, with impatient insistence. Finally he tried the door, which resisted all his efforts, although he threw his weight against it many times. Afterward, when he had wearied of this futile attack, he went to the window and examined it. Silence ensued—silence so long continued that I judged—and rightly—that he had taken himself off. Thereupon I slept placidly until an hour before sunrise.

When I had eaten I set forth again into the wood, as I had done the day before. Yet this course irked me mightily. It seemed to me far better that I should take open issue with the chevalier rather than thus make avoidance of him. In the end I turned back, with the purpose of facing the man as soon as ever he should come in quest of me. The resolve heartened me greatly, inasmuch as my behavior hitherto had smacked of the cowardly, for which I have no liking.

When, at last, I came again to the clearing, and mounted the knoll, I beheld the chevalier, sitting patiently in the open doorway. He heard my steps, and looked up, just as I came to a standstill, a rod away from him. At sight of me he sprang to his feet, but on this occasion I was not favored with one of his exquisite bows. On the contrary, he remained for a long moment motionless, regarding me with a piercing stare. When, finally, he addressed me, his voice was harshly menacing.

"Well, Mr. Marr," he said. "I sought you yesterday—in vain. I must confess, to my surprise, since you had given me your word that you would await me here. The packet has been delivered to you. I believe?"

"Why, as to that—yes," I replied, as he paused for my answer, but I vouchsafed not a word more. For a few seconds he continued silent, as if in expectation that I would complete my explanation. When it became plain to him that my speech was ended, he spoke again, in a manner less threatening.

"Mr. Marr," he said. "I am waiting for you to deliver me the packet, according to your promise."

My response came promptly:

"Under the circumstances, Chevalier Vanderdecken, I must decline to give that packet into your keeping."

"What do you mean by that, sir?" he demanded furiously. "If I remember correctly you pledged me your word as to this matter. I had supposed you to be a man of honor."

But the taunt left me unmoved, since my own conscience did not accuse me.

"Exactly, chevalier," I retorted. "It is precisely because I am a man of honor that I must now break the promise which, unknowingly, I gave in aid of villainy."

"How, sir!" the chevalier cried out fiercely. "Do you dare thus to beard me—me?"

Of a verity, his savage rage was vastly impressive, but I withstood it, undismayed.

"I shall force you to retract this insolence," he stormed. With the words he whipped out his rapier, despite the fact that I wore no sword, and made no movement. "Ah!" he exclaimed petulantly, as the fact came to his attention: "you are unarmed. Fetch your rapier at once, if you please, sir."

But still I made no motion, save that I shook my head in refusal.

"On the contrary," I said contemptuously. "I am armed." In speaking I shifted the fowling-piece from its place under my arm, and deliberately set the hammer a-cock, and looked to the priming. "I beg of you, Chevalier Vanderdecken," I continued, "that you will leave this neighborhood without delay.

If you refuse, or make any attempt to attack me, I shall shoot you down as I would a dog. I shall not be so foolish at this time as to give you the satisfaction that a man of honor has the right to demand, for the simple reason that my duty forbids. Moreover, I am far from certain that you are justly entitled to the privileges of a man of honor."

After I had delivered myself thus curtly, followed an interval of silence, during which the chevalier stared at me malignantly, and I stared back at him with all the resolution I could muster. But soon I saw the wrath die out of his eyes, and in its stead came the calm of concentrated thought, though always he held his gaze unwaveringly on my face. Of a sudden, without uttering another word, he turned about, strode across the clearing, and disappeared within the wood.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT BEFEL IN THE HOLLOW.

THE chevalier had been gone but a little time when misgivings began to assail me. I reflected that this adventurer was not a man to rest supine before one who threatened destruction of his hopes. He had at his beck the crew of the brigantine, doubtless a sturdy set of fellows ready to obey his every command, while I was quite alone.

Mistress Ellen Dunton had thought that the packet might be safer with me than in her father's house, and for that reason had desired me to retain it in my keeping. Now, however, the conclusion was forced on me that the girl's belief was wrong. Surely she herself might easily conceal the packet in some hiding-place known only to herself. The chevalier would hardly dare bring his force to attack the mansion of Sir Elbert Dunton. But the possibility was quite otherwise as to the cabin occupied by Walter Marr. It was possible—nay, even probable, as it seemed to me—that the papers in my care were by no means safe, so long as I carried them on my person.

True, I myself might put them in a hiding-place, but certainly this should not be done until after I had seen the

girl, in order to tell her of the place chosen. Otherwise, there would be no means for their discovery should aught untoward befall me. These various considerations speedily convinced me that it were the part of wisdom to disregard Mistress Ellen's decision as to the expediency of visiting her before her father's return. For that matter, I hoped that I might contrive to meet her without making known to others the fact that we had any previous acquaintance.

Having thus determined, I forthwith attired myself in my best dress, of a pearl color which I thought especially becoming, put powder to my hair, and buckled on my rapier. Finally, I wrapped myself in a cloak, to save my finery from the ravages of bushes and brambles by the way. Thus equipped, I set off joyously through the forest, for, to tell the truth, it was not chiefly concern for the fate of the packet that was in my thoughts, but rather the delighted fancies of a lover who hastens to the side of his beloved. So, I went rapidly, being familiar with the trail that ran along the river's edge, although I had never followed it quite to the dwelling of Sir Elbert.

This was hardly more than a mile distant, and after a quarter of an hour I came to the door of the mansion, where I was received by an imposing majordomo in a cherry-colored livery. The numerous other servants about were all blacks, as indeed was then the rule in the Colony. I gave my name, and inquired for the ladies of the house. I was informed, to my great satisfaction, that Mistress Ann Dunton was absent on a visit in the neighborhood, but that Mistress Ellen was at home.

I was ushered into a drawing-room off the entrance-hall, a room which had a comfortable air of homely grandeur grateful to my eyes after the barrenness of my cabin. Especially I noted with pleasure the little touches of femininity here and there, as in the dragon-bowls filled with roses and sweet-william. But I had no more than time for a single glance about me before the girl entered.

It was with a new, an exquisite rapture, that I beheld this stately creature of hoops and brocades and high-coiffed,

powdered hair, who undulated into a curtsy very low and graceful. Yet, the splendors of her costume dazzled me for but one moment. Then, as always, it was the glory of her face that held me enthralled. The delicate tints of her complexion were now emphasized by the black beauty-patches on her cheeks, and the scarlet, curving lips between the dimples were bent to a smile of welcome.

The loveliness of her put all my being in a sudden tumult, so that the awkwardness of embarrassment was in the bow I gave her. But I mastered this emotion enough to make immediate explanation, for I saw surprise and something akin to dismay in the glance of her eyes.

"I beg the pardon of Mistress Dunton for this seeming disobedience to her wishes." I spoke in a low voice, since I knew not what listeners might be at hand. "But, indeed, as to this visit of mine to the house of Sir Elbert Dunton, none need know that it was meant only for you. Since I am come all the journey from England for that purpose, it is hardly surprising that I should pay my respects here."

"Yes," the girl agreed simply. "And, fortunately, you are come at the time of my sister's absence. But tell me, then, was there no particular reason for your coming—though you are very welcome."

"It was to inform you, Mistress Dunton," I answered, "that I have had an interview with the chevalier, in which I refused to deliver him the packet."

Ere I had time to utter another word, Master Harry Dunton lounged into the drawing-room. He stopped short at sight of me, and his jaws went agape ludicrously, in the shock of surprise. It was clear that he had had no knowledge of my presence there, no idea of its possibility, even. I made him a slight bow, but he did not so much as try to return it.

"Why, gad! it's—it's—Mr. Marr!" he stammered.

"At your service, Mr. Dunton," I replied. "I have called, sir, to pay my respects to the daughters of my friend, Sir Elbert."

"Eh?" the boy exclaimed. "You know my uncle?"

"It is because he is my friend that I

have adventured into this New World," I explained. Then I turned toward the girl. "But you will be seated, Mistress Dunton?" I said.

She gave me her fingers, and I led her to a chair. She motioned that I should take one close at hand, while Harry, unbidden, threw himself into a seat by the door, where he remained in scowling silence while the girl and I chatted in formal fashion of London and of those who were known to both of us. But suddenly the lad stood up and approached me.

"Perhaps, Mr. Marr," he said, as we interrupted our conversation at his coming, "you would like to see the stables." He spoke hesitatingly, as was his habit, and he did not raise his eyes to mine. I took advantage of his lowered gaze to glance swiftly to Mistress Ellen for guidance. She raised her brows as if in expression of surprise, but nodded slightly in answer to my silent inquiry.

"An excellent idea," she said pleasantly. "But you must bring him back, Harry, for a glass of wine."

"So, presently, I found myself walking through the grounds, with Master Harry Dunton at my side. I observed that the young man did not lead me in the direction of the stables, but I allowed the fact to pass without comment, for I was curious to know his purpose. We went on thus in complete silence until we came into a little hollow, some two hundred yards or more from the mansion and remote from any of the offices. Here we were quite concealed from the view of any one who did not penetrate the fringe of shrubberies that bordered the place. It was this sequestered nook that my guide had chosen for our converse.

"I had to speak privately with you, Mr. Marr," he explained at once, when we had come to a halt, facing each other. His voice was half apologetic, half defiant.

"Very well, sir," I said encouragingly, as he palled as if in doubt how to proceed. "I am ready to hear whatever you may have to say to me."

"Well, then, it's this way," he blurted out. "I have heard from the Chevalier Vanderdecken. You understand, sir? You have not given him that packet as you made agreement to do, Mr. Marr."

"Aha!" I exclaimed. "It is, then, the packet that is the cause of your trouble, even as I had guessed. Mr. Dunton, permit me to advise you against pressing me for any explanation of my attitude in this affair."

But the lad was heedless of the warning. It was plainly to be seen that he labored under great excitement, and I drew from this fact the conclusion that the matter was of most serious moment to him. As he went on speaking now, his voice was a tremble.

"But I tell you, Mr. Marr, that you must give up the packet!" he cried. "You must give it to me, if not to him. You pledged your word, sir! If you refuse, you make yourself guilty of a lie."

"Pray choose your language with more care, sir," I admonished coldly.

"But you cannot deny it," the boy clamored. "You gave your word, and now you will not keep it. Sir, will you give me back that packet, which I trusted to your honor?"

"No, sir, I will not," I answered decisively.

"Gad, sir, then I'll take it from you!" the boy shouted, mad with resentment. With the words, he plucked forth his rapier and lunged at me in a fierce manner.

The thrust was an unfair one, for he had given no warning of his intent. But I was not unprepared for some such outburst of his wrath, and by a nimble spring I managed to avoid his point, the while I drew forth my own blade. An instant later we engaged, and the remainder of the combat was simplicity itself. This boy was no such swordsman as the chevalier, and he had underrated my skill, just as I had underrated that of his friend. In a trice I had twisted the rapier from his grasp, and sent it spinning through the air, to fall some yards away.

And then, at the very moment when I heard the soft thud of the steel as it reached the ground, my ear caught also a padding sound, the sound of feet running over the turf. I looked up, and saw a number of men armed with hangers, darting toward me down the slope of the hollow. I advanced my blade in readiness against the onslaught of the

foremost, since there was no time for flight, and parted my lips to shout for aid.

But there came no cry from me. Even as a noise behind startled me, a crashing agony was in my brain, a thousand flames danced before my eyes for a second—went out, and left in their stead a fathomless void of blackness wherein I plunged to an unconsciousness as of death.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BITS OF PAPER.

WHEN, at last, intelligence began to return to me, my first impression was nothing beyond that of the intolerable pain which beat within my head. But after a considerable interval this suffering lessened to some extent, and the mist that had been before my eyes cleared away. Already I had become aware in vague fashion of the fact that I was powerless to move. Now I perceived that my hands and feet were closely bound with cords.

Then, indeed, I realized distinctly the thing that had occurred to me; I understood that I was the prisoner of those men who had closed in on me the while I fought against Harry Dunton, in the hollow. As my wits quickened, I stared about me anxiously, if haply I might learn something definite as to my whereabouts.

I saw a long, low-ceiled room, very plainly furnished. There were no windows in the walls, but light in plenty streamed down through a skylight. A table stood in the center, and about it were a few chairs. I lay stretched on a broad settle, to which a mattress had been added. No one was in the room with me, but from somewhere down the passage on which an open door gave, came a sound of talking, in the rough voices of men. A pervasive odor came to my nostrils, and after a little snuffing of it I knew the tarry smell.

At once, then, I made sure as to the place of my captivity, and its cause. I was a prisoner on board the brigantine of the Chevalier Vanderdecken, who by this quick action now had within his reach the packet he so coveted. At the thought

I lifted my bound hands, and twisted them to the left until my right arm pressed against my breast. To my relief, I felt there the thin bulk of the packet. As yet, then, it was in my possession.

Before I had opportunity for further reflection, there came a noise of steps descending a stairway at some distance down the corridor. In another moment the chevalier entered the room; with him came Harry Dunton. The foreigner paused by the table, and stood leaning against it the while he regarded me with an expression of malicious triumph. The boy dropped into a chair on the opposite side of the table.

For a little, the chevalier gloated over me without speaking, nor was I minded to break the silence. When, finally, he deigned to address me, his voice took on its most honeyed accents.

"Mr. Marr," he said, "this is, indeed, very unfortunate. . . . Alas, sir, your misadventure was unavoidable. I confess that I do not understand the reason why you have concerned yourself so intimately with my affairs. The fact, however, is sufficient. You chose to interfere with me; you have sought to spoil my plans. On that account, I have been compelled to use violence against your person. I am afraid that my men treated you somewhat roughly. I regret that another business prevented my accompanying the party sent to fetch you hither. Let me assure you, nevertheless, that your hurt, though painful, is not serious. So much, Mr. Marr, by way of explanation and apology. Now, let us get to business."

As he concluded, the chevalier straightened up briskly, moved close to me, and put his hands to my bosom. I said nothing, nor did I make any effort to resist him. I knew the nature of the man well enough to be sure that entreaties would be in vain; my bonds rendered any attempt at physical violence impossible. His fingers fumbled for a few seconds within the breast of my coat, then drew forth the packet.

"Let me thank you, Mr. Marr, for carrying this about with you," the chevalier exclaimed gaily, as he examined the seals to make sure that they were unbroken. "I had feared lest you might take a notion to hide it somewhere."

He turned from me and tossed the packet down on the table, between him and Master Harry.

"Be good enough to look at it," he directed crisply: "and tell me if it be the one you were to deliver to me."

The lad picked up the parcel and glanced over it.

"Yes," he said, "that is the one, and the seals have not been tampered with."

At this, I spoke for the first time.

"I have not opened the packet," I said indignantly. "More than that, I know absolutely nothing as to the nature of its contents. But I am quite aware of the fact that neither one of you two has any sort of right to its possession."

"And by what means, sir, did you gain this very interesting information?" the chevalier demanded.

But the question recalled me to discretion. I had no wish to involve Mistress Ellen Dunton, and for her sake I made no answer. The chevalier stared hard at me, as if puzzled over my obstinacy. Then, presently, he laughed lightly.

"After all," he said, "it is of no importance, since you have failed in your intent."

He stretched his hand out across the table toward Master Harry, who put the packet in it, and for a few seconds he contemplated the parcel fondly. Then he broke the seals and undid the covering of oiled silk. I observed his proceedings with considerable eagerness, despite the humiliation of my position, for I was full of curiosity as to the contents of the bundle. A glance showed me that the boy, too, was looking on with an expression of unusual excitement in his eyes.

A startled exclamation from the chevalier brought my gaze back to him. He was staring fixedly at the small heap of papers which he had taken from the wrapper. Now he dropped them on the table, where he pushed them backward and forward rapidly, as if sorting them. So much I could see, though nothing of the papers themselves, from the point where I lay stretched out on the settle. Their behavior puzzled me vastly, but the explanation was not long delayed. Of a sudden the chevalier turned on Harry a look that was fairly murderous.

There was a malignant fury in his tone when he spoke, though his voice was not raised.

"So, you fool," he said, "you thought to cozen me!"

The lad's face went white as chalk before the words and the look that accompanied them, and he shrank back in his chair as if fearing a blow.

"I—I don't—understand," he faltered. "What is it?"

"What is it!" the chevalier repeated contemptuously. "Why, as to that, nothing much. Only, I paid you your price for the papers you were to steal for me. I paid you that price because the papers meant much to me—to my country. I have paid you, I say—with good golden guineas. And you—you lying, thieving coward!—you dare bring me—these!"

But this was more than even the poor spirit of this boy could endure without remonstrance. He sprang to his feet and started to unsheath his rapier.

"Stop that!" cried the chevalier. "If you draw, sir, I shall kill you here and now. I am not in the mood for trifling."

Before the piercing eyes and the commanding voice the lad wavered for a moment, struggling as best he might against his dread of the man. But he knew, as did I, that the threat was no idle one, and it damnted him. He took his hand from his sword-hilt, and spoke again, in tones low and indistinct.

"Tell me, chevalier. Tell me, I beg of you! What is this that I have done?"

"Done!" cried the chevalier, raging anew. "Why, sir, you have brought me these." He brought down his fist in a crashing blow upon the table, "These!" he repeated in a terrible voice.

The lad bent forward and scrutinized the scattered papers. Then he reached forth a hand, and I could make out that he, in his turn, was shuffling the papers about. Presently he straightened up and stared defiantly at the chevalier.

"I did not know it," he exclaimed desperately. "I swear to you that I did not know it! I took the papers sealed from the strong-box. Ah! Ah!" he cried wildly, whirling about toward me. "It was you who did this!"

The chevalier, too, wheeled, and regarded me balefully.

"Did you? I wonder," he said slowly.

I guessed from his manner that the denials of the boy had not been without effect on his suspicions. For that matter, it was my own opinion that in this instance Master Harry spoke honestly.

"May I ask you to tell me what is this thing of which you accuse me?" I suggested, for indeed I was devoured with curiosity.

The chevalier was still in a dangerous mood, but his wrath had cooled sufficiently to restore his suave courtesy of demeanor.

"By all means, Mr. Marr," he answered at once. "You are accused of having taken from the sealed packet which was given into your keeping the papers it originally contained, and of substituting therefor a like number of quite worthless sheets of blank paper."

At this astounding statement on the part of my captor, I regarded him for a short space with eyes of wonder. At first, indeed, I could scarcely believe in the possibility of an outcome so extraordinary, yet there was the fact of the chevalier's rage after opening the packet. Yes, incredible as it seemed, such was the issue of the adventure. This, then, was the end of this wily foreigner's schemings. But as a pang from my broken head made me wince, I reflected grimly that I, too, had been victimized by this amazing packet. And now of a sudden, the harsh humor of the affair smote me, and I roared with laughter.

The chevalier eyed me sourly, the boy scowled in bewilderment; but I did but laugh the harder, and kept at it until my sense of mirth was glutted. A handful of blank sheets—nothing more! For these, the three of us had plotted, had fought against one another. Aye, and she, too, the girl—she had striven for them. At the thought of her my merriment ceased, my mood changed again to pondering on the mystery that was in the affair. If there was a sort of humor in the present phase of the situation, there was none the less the tragedy that lay within this secret.

I would have questioned the chevalier, but now he turned from me, and I soon

perceived that my laughter had dissipated his suspicions of my part in the matter.

He addressed himself to Harry Dunton.

"Well, sir," he said, "it seems that you have bungled your task monstrously. I must thank you for the destruction of some very pretty hopes which I had builded. Moreover, sir, I shall be obliged to you for the return of certain guineas of mine which are just now in your keeping. I do not pay out my gold for bits of blank paper such as these."

I saw the lad's face go pallid again at these words, and, despite my contempt, the suffering and terror in his eyes moved me to a momentary pity for the wretch. His voice was broken and husky as he made protestation.

"No, no, chevalier! Do not blame me. I tell you, it was not my fault, sir. I—I cannot give you back the gold. It would mean my—ruin! Oh, sir, let me try again. I will do anything—everything."

Other prayers and promises he made, speaking wildly, incoherently, and the tears ran down his face as he thus besought mercy of his master.

In the end, the chevalier grudgingly granted what he was pleased to term mercy.

"I had meant to sail to-night," he said, "but I shall be merciful toward you, inasmuch as you are more fool than knave. Therefore, I shall remain at anchor until the morrow. Before sun-up, Harry Dunton, you will come on board here, bringing with you those papers for which I bargained with you, or in their stead my guineas. I prefer the papers, as you well know. It is for this reason I give you a final chance. But one or the other I must and will have, sir. Should you, by any chance, fail me, I shall take pains to give to the authorities of the Colony precise information concerning the nephew of Sir Elbert Dunton."

At the threat, the young man showed a visage even more ghastly than before, and he stood shuddering. The chevalier turned from him to me, and the menace was gone from his voice as he spoke.

"Mr. Marr," he said, "it is necessary that you should remain my prisoner until this affair is at an end. If you require

food or drink, you are at liberty to call out. A guard will be within hearing, and will attend to your needs."

Having thus spoken, the chevalier made me a bow and went out of the room, Master Harry Dunton slinking at his heels like the beaten hound he was.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE.

NO sooner was I left alone than my distress at the situation in which I found myself took on a new poignancy. Hitherto, my suffering and my interest in the opening of the packet had kept my thoughts occupied, but now, in solitude, I fretted over the restraint of my bonds and was mad with impatience to be up and away, in order that I might frustrate the designs of this villain and his tool. Therefore, as prisoners in such case always will, I tugged at the cords about my wrists until the flesh was bruised and aching, but these efforts proved wholly unavailing. Afterward, I racked my wits for some ruse to aid me in this plight, but none could I find.

At length I shouted for the guard, and a swarthy rascal hurried in answer to the call. I demanded food, whereat the fellow grinned amiably, but shook his head to indicate that he knew no English. The like result followed a trial of the French. Then I crooked a finger toward my mouth, which I could contrive despite the bonds about my wrists, and made a munching movement of my jaws. These served the purpose, for the man smiled again and ran off, to return very quickly with a mess of stewed meat. He fed me a few mouthfuls of this, but I had little appetite, since I knew now to be vain any attempt to corrupt this guard, to whom my speech was unintelligible.

When, at last, I was rid of the fellow, I set myself again to consideration of a means of escape. For a long time, however, I tortured my brain to no purpose. And then my eyes fell on a musket that hung from its straps on the opposite wall of the cabin in which I was lying. At the first my thought of it was no more than a foolish desire to have possession of it, since any weapon seems

dearer to one in such straits as mine. But suddenly, as I stared at the piece, an inspiration flashed on me. Forthwith I set to work.

It was a strange progress that I made. The getting to the floor was easy enough, although I bruised myself somewhat in the attempt, but it was a more serious matter to put myself in a kneeling posture. Afterward, there was a grotesque crossing of the room, in which I went hopping painfully, like a decrepit grasshopper, on my knees, with my bound hands straight before me to serve as a crutch.

In the end, however, I achieved the task, and came close to the wall on which the musket hung. Luckily, I was of supple joints in those days of my youth, so that I had no great difficulty in raising my hands, bound as they were, to the gun, which I took down from the hooks. Throughout this time, I was constantly in anxiety over the open door, but fortune was kind to me, and the guard in the passage remained unconscious of my activities.

Finally, I got myself seated by the wall with the musket across my knees. Since my fingers were free, I could manage tolerably in my next task, which was to cock the piece, and to shake the powder out of the pan. Then, I set myself to fraying out the hempen cord with which my wrists were bound. This I hoped to accomplish by rubbing the cord against the sharp edge of the flint in the hammer of the gun.

But, unfortunately, the cord was a very heavy one—a rope, indeed—and the work proceeded with tedious slowness. It seemed, as well, that there was every likelihood of some one's coming to interrupt the toil ere its completion. In ten minutes of this employment I had succeeded in fraying one point of the cord very slightly, and it was apparent to me that I might well abandon the effort as profitless. And then, just as I despaired, another method came to mind.

I arranged the position of the musket so that the hammer and flint were on the inner side, that is to say, toward me, while the trigger was on the outer. Thus I brought the flint close up to the frayed part of the rope, and at the same time had the trigger ready to the touch of my finger. When I had made these

dispositions exactly to my satisfaction, I pulled the trigger, the hammer fell, and sparks flew from the flint.

I listened uneasily, fearful lest the guard should have heard the clicking noise of the firelock, but it soon became evident that he had not, and thereupon I repeated the essay. It was my hope that sparks from the flint as the hammer fell might set alight the frayed bit of the rope, which made a coarse tinder. So, a dozen times I laboriously cocked the piece, only to snap it in vain.

And then, when I was nigh complete discouragement, a spark fell fairly on the spot of tow, and smoldered there. I raised my arms then, and blew on the tiny morsel of fire until it spread and ran, smoking busily. Within the minute the charred pieces of cord were shaken from my scorched wrists, and I was plying my fingers with all haste against the bonds about my ankles. These yielded readily, so that presently I stood erect, free once more of hand and foot.

Bearing the musket, I stole softly to the door, and peered forth.

A glance revealed the fact that the cabin in which I had been confined was situated some distance down the passage from the companionway, which was at the end opposite me. At the foot of the companionway, my guard sprawled at ease on a locker, smoking voluminously. Though his back was turned toward me, I could scarcely dare hope to take him unawares, for the distance between us was considerable. Nevertheless, since delay could but lessen the chances of escape, I moved stealthily out into the passage.

It was one chance in a thousand; yet, since there was no other way, I put it to the trial. Step by step I stole down the passage, my eyes going here and there and everywhere, but always watchful of the figure of the man sitting with his back toward me on the locker at the foot of the companionway.

Twice a board creaked under my foot, and twice I paused in an agony of fear lest the fellow turn to see me and give the alarm. But he smoked on comfortably, all unknowing of what was toward, and so at last I came within a yard of him.

I stood for a second with the musket

poised aloft for the blow, and in that second he turned about and looked up at me. The expression on his face was a curious thing. His eyes bulged, his jaws fell agape; it seemed to me that I could hear the cry that trembled in his throat. But the stock of the gun struck true on his skull. He went down under it as limp and as noiselessly as a house of cards that a boy had breathed on. I gave the fellow a single look, to make sure that he would not interfere further with me, then, still carrying the musket, I crept up the companionway.

It was now growing dusk, and on this circumstance I fixed my hope. Already the shadows were heavy over the brigantine, for it was moored close in to the shore, and the great trees that here bordered the river cut off the last beams of the westering sun.

A furtive glance about, when I came to the head of the stair, showed me a number of sailors grouped forward, chatting in a jargon that was strange to me. None of them was looking in my direction, but I dared not venture out on the deck before them. There was, therefore, nothing for it but to wait, and this I did, with an impatience well-nigh unendurable. Never before were shadows so slow in falling; never before did the sun so linger on the rim of night. The time was full-fraught with terrors for me, since at each instant I thought to see some one advance upon me.

At last, however, the gloom grew so dense that I decided to try my fate.

I moved forward stealthily, yet with all possible haste. It was not a rod from the companionway to the bulwark. I reached it in safety, and was about to leap on it when a cry rang out. I turned and saw one of the crew staring toward me and pointing with outstretched hand. Thereat I flung the musket from me, cleared the bulwark at a bound, and plunged down into the river. Even while I was in the air, there came to my ears the noise of men running and shouting. As I rose to the surface, a discharge of muskets and pistols greeted me, but the balls went wide. I shook the water from my eyes, took a single glance about to make sure of my direction, then dove again, and so swam toward shore.

The night had drawn down now, with the moon not yet risen. When I came to the surface for the second time, I found to my delight that I was quite hidden in the darker shadows of the shore. A few shots rang out, but I knew that they were sent haphazard, and I feared them not at all. Soon I was out of the water, and ere my enemies had had time to lower a boat in search of me, I was running along one of the forest trails that led due north, toward the mansion of Sir Elbert Dunton.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE CABIN.

I CHOOSE my course thus for two reasons. The first was of a sort to be explained and justified by arguments. From the things I had seen and heard while a prisoner on board the brigantine, it was evident that Harry Dunton would to-night make a last effort to consummate the villainy for which the cavalier's gold was his hire. The one person to whom I could bear the news of this, as well as information concerning the mystery of the blank papers in the packet, was Mistress Ellen Dunton, who had devoted herself to thwarting the evil plotted by the foreigner.

But I have said that two reasons influenced me in this choice of a direction. The second cause was one not to be explained—a vague yet compelling alarm for the safety of this girl who had so swiftly and wholly won my heart.

I could make no guess as to the nature of the ill that threatened to befall her, but the instinct of a lover now swayed me to dreadful imaginings. As I pressed on with all the speed possible through the blackness of the forest, feeling my way by the smoothness of the trail under foot and the touch of the crowding branches on either hand, I thought less and less of the mysterious packet, of the guilt of Harry Dunton—ever more and more of her, the girl—and always with a strange, unreasoning, growing terror in behalf of her.

The moon was just rising when I came at last into the broad road that ran to the mansion of Sir Elbert, and I was then able to double my speed.

The way was short after that, and so I came presently, dripping of the river-water, and panting, into the grounds. I saw a number of blacks moving about near the house, who appeared under the domination of some unusual excitement, but my concern was with none of these, and I held my way on to the door, where—at I found the majordomo pottering about confusedly beneath the murky light of the lanterns that hung from the roof of the gallery. He looked up in astonishment as I suddenly stood before him, and threw up his hands as he perceived my dripping garments. But I gave him no time for questioning.

"I must see Mistress Ellen Dunton at once," I said curtly.

The old man wagged his head portentously.

"The Mistress Ellen is not at home, sir," he quavered.

"Where is she, then?" I demanded.

Again the majordomo shook his head, and the dismay in his face confirmed my worst fears.

"None knows whither our lady has gone," he whimpered. "She went forth for a walk alone in midafternoon. She has not returned. We have sent out in search of her."

For a while, there was silence between us. My own emotion was too mighty for any words. Yet in the few seconds that followed, despite the stress of feeling on me, my brain was grappling furiously with the problem. And it flashed on me as an inspiration of truth that here again the hand of the cavalier had been at work. Reason, too, justified this conclusion. I remembered the words which he had spoken against her meddling, as he called it, that night when we fought in the cabin.

I remembered, as well, how she had told me of his paying court to her, and of her rejection of his addresses after she had come to guess something of his true character. Here, then, were reasons in plenty why the man should hate her and seek to do her an injury. Or it might be that he loved her, and, therefore, was set to work her the worse injury. This thought maddened me, as the like must a lover, and instantly, without any clear purpose whatever, I whirled and fled from the place. I

heard the cracked treble of the major-domo shrilling after me, but I gave it no heed. I was speeding I knew not whither, in quest of Ellen Dunton.

It was almost unconsciously that I swung from the river-road into the trail that led toward my cabin. But now my passion had cooled somewhat, and I was beginning to take more coherent thought. One plan had occurred to me, and that plan I determined to follow—I would spy on the chevalier that night. Then, if I found my suspicions confirmed, I would forthwith raise a hue and cry against the man and his scoundrelly crew for the rescue of the girl. Meantime, the affair of the packet could wait.

Having thus resolved, I still held my way toward the cabin, for I was without arms of any kind. The villains of the foreigner had taken my sword from me at the time of my capture, and I had borne no other weapon. But in my chest at the cabin was a pistol, and, too, another rapier—one having a hilt of silver-gilt, set with some passable jewels, which had been a particular delight to me in the days of my foppery in London Town. I planned, therefore, to secure these weapons, and thereafter to set about finding out the truth as to the disappearance of the girl I loved.

As I stepped forth from the wood into the clearing, I halted abruptly. Here was again the unexpected, for a light shone out from between the logs of the cabin wall. It was evident that some one was in occupancy of the place during my absence, and my first guess was that the chevalier and Master Harry Dunton had met here again for secret conference—as might well be the case, inasmuch as they believed me safely confined on board the brigantine.

With the intent of reconnoitering, I stole forward very cautiously on my hands and knees, keeping in the line of the rose-bushes which grew between me and the door. From the shadow of the largest of these I peered out, and saw, to my vast astonishment, that the place was guarded by four men, who sat in silence before the closed door. The discovery disconcerted me for the time being, since it made necessary a complete change of plan. In the end, however, I retraced my slow progress until

I reached again the shelter of the wood, and thence I made a circuit to a point in the edge of the clearing at the back of the cabin.

Here, as I had hoped, I found the way free before me, and so I went forward up the knoll, having the hut between me and the men on guard at the door. When, finally, I was come to the building itself, I set my eyes to a chink between the logs, whence the plastering had fallen, and looked within.

At the sight that met my eyes I was as one turned to stone. There, in the center of the squalid room, lighted by a single candle, stood Ellen. Even then, in this instant of overwhelming amazement, the radiant loveliness of her smote me anew, and my heart was thrilled to rapture as my gaze rested on her. But after this emotion came a fierce rage boiling in my blood, for opposite her stood a man, elegant, serene, smiling—the Chevalier Vanderdecken.

As the blood-veil lifted from my eyes and my ears opened, I perceived that the interview was but just begun, and, for all my detestation of the malevolent creature, I, as one who had given much study to such foibles of elegance, was forced to note and to admire the singular grace of the bow with which he saluted the girl. And his voice was of a most winning sweetness as he spoke.

"It grieves me beyond measure, Mistress Dunton," he said, "that my necessity should cause distress to you."

"I do not understand you, sir," came the quick answer, as he paused. "nor do I wish to. I have a fancy that the less I know of the Chevalier Vanderdecken, the happier and the better I shall be."

Again the chevalier bowed low.

"It is unfortunate," he said suavely, "that I am so in the habit of taking whatsoever I choose that I cannot cease from it even at the desire of Mistress Ellen Dunton."

At that the girl shot him a glance of scorn so deadly I marveled that the man could stand before it. And he, for all his self-assurance, did not remain wholly unabashed. His eyes fell for a moment, while he debated an answer. But of a sudden he straightened haughtily, and his eyes blazed as he raised them again to her face.

"You have been pleased to flout me," he said with sullen resentment in his voice—"me, who am not accustomed to be flouted. You have thwarted me, who am not used to be thwarted. Well, Mistress Ellen, I take my revenge—that is all." For a while he stood silent; then added abruptly, with a vehemence that made the girl shrink from him: "No, it is not all, for—I love you!"

They were wonderfully spoken, those words. At the hearing of them, I hated the man as I had never dreamed I could hate, for in them was a winsome tenderness, a seductive caressing that, as I thought, no maiden might withstand. Yet, somehow, this girl was quite unmoved by the charm of the man, which even I felt so strongly, though I loathed him because I feared him there in the presence of the woman whom I loved.

She answered him quietly, but very firmly:

"I do not believe you, sir."

At this the chevalier, in his turn, shrank back, and a curious change came into his face. He appeared to hesitate a little ere he retorted with a question:

"Why do you say this to me, Mistress Ellen?"

"Because it is the truth," the girl replied spiritedly. "I do not believe that you love me. You are the victim of your own imagining. You mistake a passing mood for a lasting devotion."

"You utter absurdities," the chevalier returned hotly. "I say again, I love you!"

"And I say that you do not. A woman knows when she is indeed loved."

"One thing, at least, is evident," the chevalier said bitterly—"that you do not love me."

"I detest you, as you already know," was the unflinching answer. "And I despise you, too, for what you have done to my cousin, Harry."

The chevalier sneered.

"I have not harmed your precious cousin," he declared. "He was worthless before I set eyes on him." Then, as a new thought came to him, he added angrily: "It was you, Mistress Ellen, who befooled us with the blank papers in the sealed packet."

The stare of amazement with which the girl greeted this accusation con-

vinced the foreigner, as it did me, that the person responsible for the substitution was still to seek.

"I do not understand," she said simply. "What is it that you mean, sir?"

"Since you know so much of this affair, there can be no harm now in your knowing more," the chevalier mused. "Well, then, the packet contained only blank bits of paper—nothing more."

The girl, however, gave heed to but one thing.

"You have the packet?" she cried.

"Yes."

"But how have you come by it?" the girl questioned fiercely. "He had it—Walter Marr. Did you take it from him?"

"Yes, to-day," the chevalier replied. "I—"

He was interrupted by the girl.

"Have you killed him?" she demanded wildly. Her beautiful face was white now, and her eyes were flaming.

The chevalier regarded her contemptuously as he made answer.

"Oh, no," he said; "Mr. Marr is well enough, although he is my prisoner."

"Ah!" It was a low-breathed exclamation from the girl, who, as she uttered it, sank down on the settle by the wall and sat there, motionless and drooping.

A period of silence followed, broken at last by the chevalier.

"Is it possible," he asked in a tone of contemptuous wonder, "that Mistress Ellen Dunton loves the penniless adventurer who makes his dwelling in this hut?"

At the question, and the manner of it, the girl's form grew tense, and she raised her head proudly.

"Leave me, sir," she said, "without adding further to your insults."

The chevalier bowed again.

"I shall leave you for a time," he replied, "in order to complete my arrangements. I shall return soon, to take you with me to the brigantine."

"To the brigantine!" the girl repeated, springing to her feet.

"Why, certainly," the foreigner assented, "since I sail at sunup of the morrow, and you are to sail with me."

Having so spoken, he bowed once more, turned to the door, opened it, and

went out, while his victim remained staring after him with dilated eyes in which was all despair.

I shall pass over the various emotions that vibrated in me during this extraordinary dialogue. At the end of it, I was beside myself with wrath against the smiling devil who could thus coolly plot the destruction of a maiden. Yet, despite the virulence of my passion, I realized the need of caution, and strove to restrain myself from yielding to madness. I was alone, unarmed, with five against me, and one of these had already proved himself my master with the sword. And I knew, too, that should I fail now the last hope of Mistress Ellen would be gone forever. On me lay the sole chance for her safety, and the time for action was pitifully short. I must act at once—but how?

The idea that came into my head at last was very simply and easily suggested by the method in which I had been able to play the spy. While I was yet peering into the room, I remembered that a log of the wall, against which I had once leaned when pushing my chest along the floor, had yielded a little from its place. Forthwith, I moved to the corner on my left, where this log lay, and tried it gently.

To my delight, it moved slightly. There was a hole of some size beneath it; through this I thrust my hand, and drew the end of the log a little way forth from its fellows. But I perceived now that it would be unsafe to pull the end wholly free before the next upper log which rested on it should be shored up. It occurred to me that a heap of branches lay at a little distance back in the clearing. I hurried thither, and found a sturdy bit of limb with a fork at one end. Returning to the cabin, I thrust the other end of this branch into the ground at an angle such as to bring the fork for a support of the upper log.

Now again I set to pulling on the loosened log, and presently it swung out a little way from the plane of the wall. The movement displaced some fragments of plaster, which went rattling down to the floor of the cabin, so that I was in great alarm lest the girl cry out at the sound. Happily she did not, and when I looked through the hole I

saw that she was still standing as before, her eyes fixed on vacancy. So I put my head within the opening and spoke in a whisper:

"Mistress Ellen! Mistress Ellen! It is I—Walter Marr."

At first she did not hear me, but when I repeated the call a little more loudly, she gave a start and faced about toward the back of the cabin. In the dim light of the candle she was unable to recognize me readily, as I guessed, and I spoke again quickly, to reassure her.

"It is I—Walter Marr. I am come to save you, Mistress Ellen. Do not make a noise, but come to me here, at the back wall of the cabin."

After a moment she understood, and drawing near the wall, stooped and put her face down close to mine.

"But I—I thought that you were a prisoner on board the brigantine," she faltered. There was much wonder and, I dared believe, a great delight in the softly murmured words.

I told her briefly of my escape and of my plan to free her. Then I directed her to open the chest, which was at her side, and to take from it the pistol and the rapier. This she did, while I pulled the log yet farther out from the wall. The weapons were handed to me, and I left them lying on the ground while I aided the girl to crawl through the opening. Luckily, the log was of a generous girth, so that the hole it left was sufficient for our purpose. But the difficulty of her egress afforded me a pretext for taking her in my arms at the last, and for a blessed moment she lay on my bosom, and I felt her heart beating against mine.

When, finally, she stood safe on the turf at my side, I picked up the pistol and put it in a pocket, and buckled on the sword. Then, for a minute of rapture, I looked into her face, wanly beautiful beneath the moonlight, and listened to the music of her voice as she whispered grateful words.

And then, just as I had taken her hand in mine to lead her from the place, the chevalier came around the corner of the cabin, and stood smiling.

The girl saw him at the same instant as did I, and I felt her dear hand quiver within my grasp. But in me, the spec-

tales of this man now provoked but one emotion—a frenzy of hate. On the instant, I cast the girl's hand from me, drew my rapier, and rushed upon him. I had no thought then of his greater skill: I gave no heed to the girl's danger should he triumph over me. A single purpose dominated me—there and then to kill this man who had insulted Ellen.

I believe that, for some curious reason, the fury of my assault daunted the villain, great as was his prowess with the sword, since he made no effort to attack me in turn, but gave his whole care to fending off the sheaf of thrusts I hurled at him. And once the laggardness of his parry threw my point to his thigh, and it came away ruddy with his blood. The sight thrilled me to new ardor, and I shouted exultantly.

It was at this moment that my arms were caught and held, and I found myself writhing futilely in the clutches of the four guards, who had come running at the sound of steel clanging on steel. Soon my hands were fast bound behind my back.

A glance showed me the girl lying in a crumpled heap on the greensward, and I knew that before this last catastrophe she had swooned. The chevalier gave a few quick orders in a tongue that was strange to me; then he vanished into the night. Presently a horse was brought, and one of the men, having mounted, received the form of the unconscious girl into his arms and set off, with one of his fellows leading the horses. The other two took me each by an arm, and thus we proceeded from the place, following the trail that ran by the riverside in the direction of the brigantine. Resistance now was altogether useless, and I went forward sullenly as my captors guided me, in the wake of the horseman.

We came at last to a boat, in which we were rowed to the side of the brigantine. Once on board, the girl and I were taken down into the cabin where I had been confined, and there, while I stood by helpless, one of the men set to chafing her hands, and to sprinkling her face from time to time with drops of water. It seemed to me an eternity that she lay inert on the locker, without

any sign of life in her, so that I made sure she was indeed dead. And then, at last, her lips parted in a fluttering sigh; she opened her eyes and looked about her dazedly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMING OF ANN.

THE man who was ministering to the girl now gave her a spoonful of spirits, which set her choking; but put some color in her cheeks and gave her strength. She looked up at me as I stood bound before her, and had opened her lips to speak when an interruption came.

This was in the person of the chevalier, who entered the cabin hurriedly; but stopped short at sight of the girl as she struggled into a sitting posture.

"I am glad to see that Mistress Ellen Dunton has recovered," he said, with an air of formal politeness. "As to you, sir," he continued, bending his brows on me, "since you have taken such extraordinary interest in me, I shall take pains to see that you are provided for in the future according to your deserts. I think that I shall sell you to some one among my friends, the planters in the Indies."

He would have said more, but that he was interrupted by the sound of voices heard as in remonstrance from the deck. A moment afterward came the noise of steps descending the companionway, and they continued down the passage. I held my eyes fixed on the doorway in some curiosity, as did the chevalier and the girl.

And then, at the vision which appeared there, I caught my breath in amazed admiration. For this woman framed within the opening was almost as beautiful as Ellen herself. There have been some, indeed, who claimed that she was the fairer of the two, but with such blindness I have little patience. Nevertheless, I must confess that she was, of a truth, rarely lovely—a stately woman—more Junoesque of form than the girl I loved, a majestic creature, crowned to-night with rippling luster of unpowdered golden hair. There was superb dignity in her poise

as she stood motionless in the doorway, staring at the chevalier.

"I have come," she said presently, in a low, rich voice, "to say farewell to the Chevalier Vanderdecken, as he calls himself, and to tell him as well whom he has to thank for his failure."

The words broke the spell that had held Ellen silent until now. She sprang to her feet and cast herself on the bosom of the older woman, crying:

"Ann! Ann! Save me from him!"

Hitherto the newcomer, who, as I now guessed, was none other than Mistress Ann Dunton, had been unaware of her sister's presence, but she endured the shock with seeming calmness.

"How is it, Ellen, that I find you here with this man?" she questioned reproachfully.

"Ah, he stole me away. He says that he will take me with him, though I hate him so, and have told him of my hate."

The woman stared at the chevalier over the head of her weeping sister.

"So," she said disdainfully, "there is naught save evil in you. You paid your court to me, hoping to bend my woman's heart by love to aid you in your treacherous designs. When you found me honest, though a woman, you turned to my sister with the same wiles, for the same end. And again you failed. So, then, you lured a foolish boy to be your confederate by playing on his vices. And now, at last, when all your scheming has come to naught, you would have stolen away this poor girl out of sheer spite—for you do not love her."

Again the chevalier's face took on that curious expression which it had worn in the cabin when Ellen denied that he loved her. And now he spoke for the first time since the coming of the woman.

"Why do you say that?" he said.

"Because you can love no woman," Ann replied bitterly. "You are but a selfish, heartless creature of evil. Heaven be praised, I have been able to undo your wickedness here!"

"Just what do you mean?" the chevalier asked.

"I mean," was the reply, "that I came here for a single purpose—to taunt you before letting you go."

"Could I not go without your letting?" came the quiet question.

"No!" the woman answered. "My messenger on the shore awaits my return to a certain safe place alone, within the half-hour. Unless I come to him, or send him certain word, he will ride through the night with information that will make the river alive with your enemies. Do you understand now, sir?"

"Why, yes, I understand as to that," the chevalier said softly. "And so you will let me go?"

"Yes—since you have failed," Ann answered. "And I wish you to know that you failed because of me."

"It was you, then," responded the pleasant voice of the adventurer.

"Yes, it was I. Because it was necessary that I should have certain moneys from the strong-box during the time of my father's absence, the key of which was left with me. It was I who took out the sealed packet and substituted in its stead one of similar appearance, sealed with my own seal. This was the revenge of an angry woman, who hated you for your treachery and wished to humiliate you."

"If you hate me so, why do you let me go?" the chevalier demanded.

Before the glance that was now in his eyes the woman quailed for the first time, and her own gaze fell.

"Tell me," he commanded. "Is it true? Will you let me go because you love me?"

He went a step toward her, and spoke again in a torrent of words.

"And I had thought you cold—without a heart—you! For I—I loved you! Loved you! Do you hear? I did not understand at first—I did not guess what you would come to mean to me. So I sought to woo you to my ends. Afterward, when the truth came home to me, it was too late—you spurned me.

"I—well, I thought you unfeeling—you—a woman of ice, who could never love as I would be loved by you. This girl was nothing to me—ever! I have tried to delude myself into thinking that I cared for her, but I knew in my soul that her only charm for me lay in some faint resemblance to you. And now—now—I know the truth: that you are of fire, not of ice; that you are wondrous bold, not timid; that you are, indeed, all I loved, and infinitely more.

"You have thought me despicable. It is not true, Ann. I fight for my country. I carry letters of marque. France is at war with England. It was my duty to get possession of the plans for the next inland campaign here, which are in Sir Elbert's keeping. Duty to your country required you to save them from me, and you have succeeded where I have failed. But in that other thing—that thing which means more, everything to me—Ann, have I failed in that? Do you love me, Ann, after all? Will you go with me? In my own land you shall have a name of much honor. Will you come with me, Ann? Will you leave father and sister and country for love of me?"

I do not think any woman could have resisted that plea as he spoke it, in a voice of exquisite tenderness. Certainly, this woman could not—for she loved him. The radiant joy of her was very wonderful to see as she gently put her sister aside and went to the chevalier and put her arms about his neck and lifted her face to his and kissed him.

I turned from the supreme happiness that shone in the faces of the lovers to look toward the girl, Ellen, and at the same moment her eyes rose to meet mine. In them was something elusive, thrilling—something that made me dream of a like joy for ourselves in the days yet to come. And then she drew near to me, even as Ann had gone to her lover; and she put her slender fingers within the grasp of my bound hands. So, for a time, two by two together, the four of us stood silent.

Ann was still within the shelter of the chevalier's arm when he drew a hunting-knife from its sheath and stepped forward to sever my bonds.

"Our countries are at war, Mr. Marr," he said, "but I hope that hereafter you and I may come to be friends

(The end.)

in times of peace. As to you," he continued, turning to Ellen, "I doubt that you will ever forgive me. You spoke the truth to me to-night. But do you, by so much as ever you love, be merciful toward one who sinned against you because he believed that he loved in vain."

The chevalier faced me again, with his most winsome smile.

"And now, Mr. Marr," he said, "let us take a turn on deck together, while these sisters say their farewell, since Ann will sail with me."

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

IT was of an afternoon, two months later, that I was sitting with Mistress Ellen Dunton on the gallery of Sir Elbert's mansion, in the Colony of Virginia. And I took out of a pocket a letter I had just received from my grandfather, and showed it to her, calling her particular attention to this passage, which I had marked:

I hear very good reports of you from Sir Elbert. Now that you are behaving yourself as a man should, you are welcome to that income from me which was your father's, and it is sufficient to a gentleman of your rank for the maintenance of a seemly household. I had always hoped that you might marry one of Sir Elbert's daughters, inasmuch as my estate, which will be yours some day, marches with his. Now that Ann has married this Frenchman, there is left only Ellen. Should you be minded to marry the lass, the match would be a most excellent one, from every point of view.

"And for once I quite agree with the old gentleman," I said, my cheek to the girl's.

"And so do I," said she.

THISTLE-DOWN.

Down o' the thistle! Sooth, could lighter thing
Upon the wind of morn go drifting by?
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412 Third St., Roanoke, Va.

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FRANK P. HEBARD,
816 E. Fifth St., Muscatine, Ia.

I was employed as a cutter in a factory, am now with an electrical contractor, and through the knowledge gained from my Course, expect to get six times the amount of money that I received in the factory.

A. W. SPARKS,
25 Morrell St., Long Branch, N. J.

When I enrolled for my Course some time ago, I was employed as a helper in the erecting room. I am now Head Draftsman for The Buckeye Traction Ditcher Company of Findlay, and my salary has been doubled since I enrolled. My previous education was somewhat limited, and I feel that I owe what advancement I have gained entirely to your schools.

L. A. KRUPP,
331½ N. Main St., Findlay, O.

I was a laborer on the railroad when I enrolled for the Course in Surveying and Mapping in your Schools. Since that time I have been employed as Deputy County Surveyor and Assistant City Engineer, which latter position I hold at present. I found the instruction of the Surveying Course helpful and beneficial, and I am sure that I profited by taking it.

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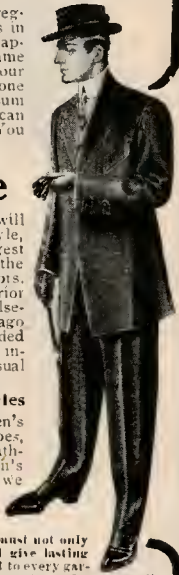
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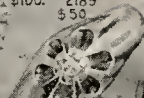
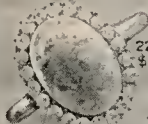


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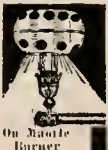
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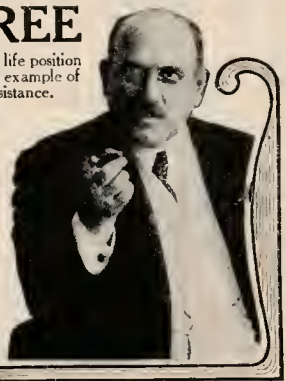
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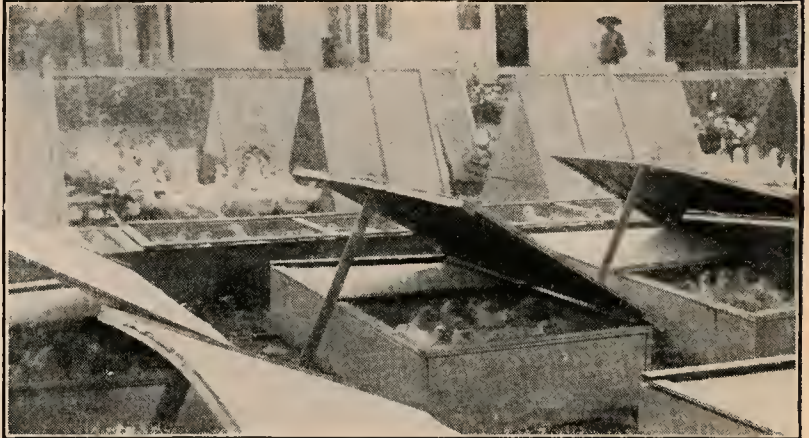
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**\$1,500.00 FROM 60 HENS IN TEN MONTHS
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TO the average poultryman that would seem impossible and when we tell you that we have actually done a \$1,500 poultry business with 60 hens on a corner in the city garden 40 feet wide by 40 feet long we are simply stating facts. It would not be possible to get such returns by any one of the systems of poultry keeping recommended and practiced by the American people, still it is an easy matter when the new

PHILO SYSTEM

is adopted.



THE PHILO SYSTEM IS UNLIKE ALL OTHER WAYS OF KEEPING POULTRY,

and in many respects just the reverse, accomplishing things in poultry work that have always been considered impossible, and getting unheard-of results that are hard to believe without seeing.

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from selecting the breeders to marketing the product. It tells how to get eggs that will hatch, how to hatch nearly every egg and how to raise nearly all the chicks hatched. It gives complete plans in detail how to make everything necessary to run the business and at less than half the cost required to handle the poultry business in any other manner.

TWO POUND BROILERS IN EIGHT WEEKS are raised in a space of less than a square foot to the broiler without any loss, and the broilers are of the very best quality, bringing here three cents per pound above the highest market price.

**OUR SIX-MONTHS-OLD PULLETS ARE LAYING
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Our new book, the **PHILO SYSTEM OF POULTRY KEEPING**, gives full particulars regarding these wonderful discoveries, with simple, easy-to-understand directions that are right to the point, and 15 pages of illustrations showing all branches of the work from start to finish.

DON'T LET THE CHICKS DIE IN THE SHELL.

One of our secrets of success is to save all the chickens that are fully developed at hatching time, whether they can crack the shell or not. It is a simple trick and believed to be the secret of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese which enabled them to sell the chicks at 10 cents a dozen.



THREE POUND ROASTERS TEN WEEKS OLD

CHICKEN FEED AT 15 CENTS A BUSHEL.

Our book tells how to make the best green food with but little trouble and have a good supply, any day in the year, winter or summer. It is just as impossible to get a large egg yield without green food as it is to keep a cow without hay or fodder.

OUR NEW BROODER SAVES 2 CENTS ON EACH CHICKEN.

No lamp required. No danger of chilling, overheating or burning up the chickens as with brooders using lamps or any kind of fire. They also keep all the lice off the chickens automatically or kill any that may be on them when placed in the brooder. Our book gives full plans and the right to make and use them. One can easily be made in an hour at a cost of 25 to 50 cents.

TESTIMONIALS.

Bellefontaine, Ohio, June 7, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I just want to tell you of the success I have had with the Philo system. In January, 1909, I purchased one of your Philo System books and I commenced to hatch chickens. On the third day of February, 1909, I succeeded in hatching ten chicks. I put them in one of your fireless brooders and we had zero weather. We succeeded in bringing through nine; one got killed by accident. On June 1, one of the pullets laid her first egg, and the most remarkable thing is she has laid every day since up to the present time.

Yours truly,

R. S. LaRue.

205 S. Clinton St., Baltimore, Md., May 28, 1909.

E. R. Philo, Publisher, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have embarked in the poultry business on a small scale (Philo System) and am having the best of success so far, sixty-eight per cent of eggs hatched by hens, all chicks alive and healthy at this writing; they are now three weeks old. Mr. Philo is a public benefactor, and I don't believe his System can be improved upon, and so I am now looking for more yard room, having but 15x30 where I am now.

Yours truly,

C. H. Leach.

South Britain, Conn., April 14, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have followed your system as close as I could; the result is a complete success. If there can be any improvement on nature, your brooder is it. The first experience I had with your System was last December. I hatched 17 chicks under two hens, put them as soon as hatched in one of your brooders out of doos and at the age of three months I sold them at 35c a pound. They then averaged 2 1/2 lbs. each, and the man I sold them to said they were the finest he ever saw, and he wants all I can spare this season.

Yours truly

A. E. Nelson.

Osakis, Minn., June 7, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—You certainly have the greatest system the world has ever known. I have had experience with poultry, but I know you have the system that brings the real profits.

Yours

Jesse Underwood.

Brookport, N. Y., Sept. 12, 1908.

Mr. E. W. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have had perfect success brooding chickens your way. I think your method will raise stronger, healthier chicks than the old way of using lamps and besides it saves so much work and risk.

Yours respectfully,

M. S. Gooding.

Send \$1.00 direct to the publisher and a copy of the latest revised edition of the book will be sent you by return mail.

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320 BROADWAY, N.Y.

A pulp magazine illustration. On the left, a large tiger with its mouth open, showing its teeth, is in a jungle setting. In the foreground, a man is seen from the chest up, holding a long-barreled rifle. He is looking towards the right. In the background, a woman with blonde hair is looking upwards with a surprised or alarmed expression. The scene is set in a lush, green jungle with mountains in the distance.

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